MOUNTAIN VERITIES

ZEPHINE HUMPHREY

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MOUNTAIN VERITIES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE HOMESTEAD
THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT
THE EDGE OF THE WOODS
GRAIL FIRE

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

MOUNTAIN VERITIES

BY

ZEPHINE HUMPHREY

AUTHOR OF "THE HOMESTEAD," ETC.

NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY

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REMOTE STORAGE

TO WHOM
SHOULD I DEDICATE THIS BOOK
BUT TO
Christopher

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I am indebted to *Scribner's Magazine* and *Country Life in America* for their courtesy in permitting me to republish the substance of six of the following chapters.

MOUNTAIN VERITIES

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I

NOT very long ago Christopher and I had what we called "a country home." Now we have only a home. The difference is immense.

The change came about through the various influences which have been so potent with us all since the Great War, challenging and disrupting our conceptions of the world we live in, revolutionizing our points of view, turning many of us right-about face and some of us upside down. Every reader knows what I mean. There is not a life anywhere that has escaped the whirlwind that sprang from the vast sowing of wind. We have only to look back at what we can remember of ourselves eight years ago and then look at what we can focus of our present selves to marvel at the transformation. "If this be I, as I think it be." But even the little

dogs are different nowadays, so there is nobody to recognize us.

Not that that matters. The great point is to find out for ourselves what we are, what we want, and whither we are bound. "Mankind has struck its tents and is on the march." Evidently. But beside what caravan route do we personally intend next to pitch the tent which we have removed?

It was perhaps from some deep-lying need for re-self-possession, self-orientation, that Christopher and I came back to Vermont. We had both been to France, had both suffered from disappointment and disillusion, were both bewildered and tired and felt several hundred years older. But more than anything else I think it was from a passionate desire for reality.

The war had never seemed real. It was a completely usurping interest, so that, while it lasted, nobody could think of anything else; but it was a nightmare, a hideous fraud. In the name of all humanity we had resented it. The ensuing years had been even worse. What a heart-breaking reaction into smallness and selfishness, greed and sordid ambition! This was not the world, our world, as we had known and loved it; this was a mad hoax. Where was the world then? It could not have been annihilated, for it was immortal; it

must be in hiding somewhere, waiting until the hurricane and earthquake were overpast. God had tucked it away and put His hand over it.

Therefore it was from no wish to escape life that we returned to our valley, but rather from a consuming wish to rediscover life as it really is. If we were to go on trying to play our part in our day and generation we must base our efforts on truth.

We were fortunate in having an old house to return to. Old houses have enough of humanity about them to seem sympathetic and responsive, but they are also sufficiently detached to abide immutably by standards of their own.

Our old house stands a mile and a half from a Vermont village, on the edge of a meadow across which it looks to a range of broken and moulded hills. Big maples shade it, behind it an apple orchard runs up a grassy slope, beside it stands an old red barn transformed by Christopher into a studio. It is serene and wise, it has lived many years, and wars and rumors of wars are not unfamiliar to it. In fact, tradition insists that Ethan Allen slept here on his way to the Battle of Bennington. But strife is the last thing it sugests or seems to remember as it broods beneath its maples in the midst of its flower gardens and watches the

lights and shadows change on the quiet hills. Surely, when it has sheltered life for so many decades and has run the gamut of human experience, it can be trusted to know what matters and what does not, what is worth remembering and what must be let slip. In the last analysis all battles are confessions of failure, whereas dear, daily human life is a constantly repeated success. That is the way I interpreted the first silent effect the house had on me as I stood and looked at it the day of our return.

I remember that the spring afternoon was drawing towards its close and that luminous shadows were folded into the hollows of the hills. The light was soft and caressing, dwelling with tenderness on the young green of the awakening forests. Bluebirds and song sparrows and meadow larks sang in the meadow. Ah! the valley was lovely—so dear and familiar, yet unfamiliar too, as if I were, in some strange way, seeing it both for the thousandth and the first time. It was certainly graver than I used to think it, stronger, more purposeful. Had the war saddened it after all? No, it was not sad, it was only deep. I let myself go into its immensity and found no metes nor bounds.

Also I remember that Christopher went the rounds of the orchard and garden with me and

then disappeared into his studio. After sitting awhile on the front steps alone, I got up and went in search of him.

"Christopher," I said, slipping my arm through his as he stood looking at some old canvases with a complex expression of dissatisfaction and interest —"that's a nice canvas, isn't it? No? Well, of course you can do better now.—Christopher, do you feel as I do, that we've been born again into a new world which is the same old dear one, and that we're very little children with everything to learn?"

Christopher nodded, leaning forward to scratch a corner of one of his canvases with his finger nail.

"It's a good feeling," I pondered, "but it's very sobering. It makes me glad too. Oh, Christopher!"

Christopher turned and gave me the glance which members of our generation will always know how to give one another, the glance which means that, whether or not we have yet managed to wash our robes white (and we certainly have not!), we have at least come out of great tribulation together.

"Now for real living!" he said.

II

ONE can realize that one has changed without understanding in what way or to what extent. In fact, the function of change is precisely to set one free of an undiscovered country, the roads and contours of which one has to learn by experiment. And while one is learning, feeling one's way, one inevitably tries to follow old familiar paths.

Take the matter of our new cook.

We had always had cooks. The habit was so settled upon me, apparently so ingrained in my nature, that I could almost as easily have thought of trying to keep house without fire and water as without a Bridget to manipulate these articles. We had generally had very satisfactory Bridgets too, so that there was no particular reason based on experience why I should dread a new relationship. Yet I did dread it, obscurely, profoundly. My heart and I were a balky horse and an enthusiastic driver, the one chirruping loudly, the other planting his four feet firmly and refusing to budge.

Our neighbors understand our domestic habits

as well as we do ourselves, and we had not been home two days before somebody came to return the oil can and the wheelbarrow ("Thanks very much. I knew you wouldn't mind me using them while you were away.") and incidentally to remark, "If you ain't got a hired girl yet, I know of just the one for you." The effect of these words on me was so disconcerting that I seriously thought my wits must be addled. Instinctively I opened my lips to say, "Good!" but an inner sinking prevented me and, to my stupefaction, I found myself hedging and hesitating, making all sorts of excuses to avoid interviewing the proffered damsel. I had never felt this way before in my life.

"Thank you; you're very kind," I stammered. "I daresay she's just what I want. But—but—I'll have to think about it a little. I—I'll let you know."

"But she's at my house now," the neighbor went on with a puzzled frown. "She came over on purpose an' was plannin' to see you this morning."

"I—I'm not sure I'm going to be home," I hurriedly temporized. "My husband was talking of going to Manchester." This fortunately was true. "At any rate, you see, I don't know——"

I broke off. What was it I did not know? I could not finish my sentence.

I think my neighbor shared my horrid suspicion that I might be a little mad. He looked at me gravely.

"You're here now," he persisted, "and it wouldn't take very long. You'd come to terms in no time."

That was just it. I was sure we should. With no reason on earth for refusing to engage her, I knew I had only to be confronted with a likely cook to come to terms with her. And the inner horse I was trying to drive stamped all his feet in absolute refusal.

I shook my head.

"I'm sorry," I said speaking as disarmingly as possible, "but you'll have to tell her to wait. Really, I don't know."

The exact nature of my inhibiting nescience was no more clearly defined than before, but this time I did not leave my sentence in the air. I closed it with a finality which, I hoped, gave it a certain dignity. Then, as my neighbor muttered, "Mebbe she won't wait," (whereat my inner horse disconcerted me more than ever by prancing with delight) I turned away to hunt up Christopher. "Now, whether or not you want to, you'll have to take me to Manchester," I stated.

On the way, I explained the situation and began trying to come to some understanding of it.

"Why," smiled Christopher matter-of-factly, "it looks to me as if you wanted to do the cooking yourself."

"But I can't, Christopher." I was shocked. "I mean I can't want to. I never have. I've always hated it."

"What was that you were saying yesterday about being born again?" asked Christopher.

It was a significant question, as Christopher's questions are apt to be, and it kept me silent a mile or two, pondering possibilities which I found very exciting. But were they possibilities? The leopard cannot change his spots, and how can a mature woman change the bias of many years and come to love that which she has always found intensely wearisome? I must be under some spell.

When we got home I went out in the kitchen and sat down in a chair by the table and fell into a profound revery. The room was not very familiar to me. Our various Bridgets had more or less frankly managed to convey the impression that they considered the kitchen their realm and that my presence in it was not strictly desirable. I had agreed with them. The library was my department.

Now, however, as I sat musing and waiting for the mystery in my own breast to begin to clear, I suddenly found that the kitchen was an attractive room. Too big for modern ideas of convenience, perhaps, but all the more restful for that, it runs across the rear width of the house, looking at one end into the flower garden and at the other, through the sunny pantry window, over to the studio and up at West Mountain. Its wide door opens into the apple orchard. As it is too big, so I daresay its arrangement of table and sink and stove is not scientific. But are convenience and efficiency the first and only things to be desired of kitchens? Is not something else more important, something that, for lack of a more definite term, we call personality? It was the personality of the old house that had drawn me to it years before. It was the personality of the library that made me love it so. And now, as I sat and waited on the kitchen's revelation, I began to perceive that it too had a soul and that it was speaking to me with a winning accent that went straight to my puzzled heart.

"Of course you don't want another cook," it said gently. "You want to come and dwell with me and let me teach you lessons of quietness and reality; you want to do for yourself and your husband those things that are fundamentally neces-

sary, that no human lot can avoid; you want to be free and independent and self-sufficient. Come then. Stop puzzling over old prejudices; they are outlived and cast aside. Come and begin again; live a new life in the new age."

I was thrilled and alertly interested, and the first stirrings of intelligent conviction were felt in me. Again, as so often before in my life, I found myself proving the ready ability of human environment (which is only another name for the sentient universe) to instruct and enlighten the heart which waits on it.

Reality. Yes, it was that I wanted, that in search of which Christopher and I had come back to Vermont. Well, here I had it right under my hand, the realest of real things, reality which cannot fool one and seem more important than it is. Cook books are no scraps of paper, and the treaties and conferences between the pantry and the ice box are probably sincere. How could a new life devoted to the principles of reality do better than begin its career in a kitchen?

There was more to the matter too. Whether or not democracy was the true motive underlying the Great War, it was the prevailing slogan, the battle cry. And if those of us who believed its sincerity were deceived, the more reason why we

should wrest a measure of success from the vast failure and crown democracy in our private lives, letting the nations flout her if they must and will. The relation between master and man, mistress and maid may once have been democratic—in the old simpler days when all households made common cause; but it is certainly not democratic now. There is even something abnormal and artificial about it which affords ample reason for the difficulties which beset it. How can two human beings live in harmonious sympathy if one always obeys while the other commands, if one has all the drudgery and the other all the privilege, if one sits alone in the kitchen and the other enjoys the warmth and fun of the family circle? Yet the very soul of family life is intimate privacy, and one would rather board and be done with it than have any stranger, even the best Bridget in the world, always by the fireside. A Bridgetless household seems the true unit of democracy.

As I sat by the kitchen table, revolving these thoughts in my enlightened mind, I began to perceive that it was to something rather big and important that life was summoning me. The world at large has repudiated the professions of the war, but all need not be lost if individuals and families here and there get soberly down to the business

of achieving reality and democracy in their private lives. Let them do their own work, let them treat one another well, let them live simply and watch and pray, and there's no telling—

I drew a long breath.

"Christopher," I said, appearing in the studio doorway, "you were right: I do want to cook."

"Now may heaven have mercy upon us!" replied Christopher feelingly.

III

TWO extraneous influences combined to help me make the most and the best of my new experience. One was, now as always, Christopher (though he can hardly be called extraneous), the other was the much maligned H. C. of L.

"We're going to have simple meals, aren't we?" Christopher asked later in the day of my refusal to engage a new cook.

"Of course," I answered promptly.

"Well, but,"—some unconscious note in my voice or perhaps some wandering gleam in my eye anxiously interrogating the pantry shelves proved not satisfactory to him—"what do you mean by simple? What, for instance, are you planning to have for supper tonight?"

"Now, Christopher!" I seized the chance he gave me to evade the question. "You know better than that. Don't you remember how desperate I used to get because Bridget would come to me the minute dinner was over and say, 'What shall we

have for supper?' It's going to be one of the best things about doing my own work that I needn't decide till the last minute."

"True enough," Christopher nodded. "But I'll bet a dollar to a doughnut that when I asked you the question just now you were turning over in your mind all the possibilities of the larder: eggs, fried potatoes, muffins, stewed rhubarb, cake."

I laughed. There is something uncanny about the way in which Christopher helps himself to my most secret thoughts.

"Now I would respectfully suggest," Christopher continued, "that instead of all that elaborate menu we have corn meal mush. I lived on it when I was an art student, and it's very good. I haven't had any for years and years. No Bridget has ever been willing to make it for me or to let me come out in the kitchen and make it myself."

Christopher's past experience as a bachelor fending for himself left an apparently inexhaustible fund of wisdom in his mind. There seems no end to the number and variety of things he knows how to do.

"You wouldn't"—his face kindled irresistibly—"I suppose you wouldn't let me come out in the kitchen and help you get supper."

"I will if you'll let me help you wash the Ford to-morrow," I answered gaily.

"All right," he assented; and forthwith we struck hands on a compact of mutual service which was to make our life together closer and more harmonious than ever—and that is saying much.

Never was anything so delicious as that first supper of corn meal mush. Oddly enough, I could not remember having eaten the viand before, so it had all the flavor of novelty to me; and to Christopher it had the dearness of association and of renewed intercourse with a long-lost and valued friend. It was symbolic too, and it struck the desired keynote of our new life more clearly and fully than anything else could have done. Simplicity and reality: twin terms that for us were to be synonymous.

"The way to enjoy food really," I said, looking up from my golden saucerful floating in milk, "is to savor it with your mind as well as with your palate. And you can't do that if it's too complicated, you become confused."

"And a little ashamed," put in Christopher. "Nobody wants to be a glutton, and if you think too much about rich and varied foods you lose your self-respect. Moreover, they don't bear thinking about. Who can follow a beefsteak very far back

in its history? But corn meal mush"—he lifted a spoonful slowly—"it's all beautiful."

"Prairies," I said.

"Sun and rain," he replied.

"Dew and moonlight."

"August heats."

"Autumn mists."

"Huskings and rumbling mills."

"And—the middleman!"

It was malicious in me to add the last item, but, after all, it was in the interests of truth. Christopher smiled ruefully.

"I hope we're all beginning to get our eyes open to the middleman," he answered.

"What other things are wholly beautiful, Christopher?" I went on after a few minutes of thoughtful degustation. "Let's see how many we can mention."

"Bread," began Christopher, recommencing our pleasant litany.

"Cheese," I supplemented.

"Eggs."

"Milk."

"All kinds of fruits."

"And vegetables."

"Rice."

"Oh, well, all cereals."

"Nuts."

"Tea and coffee."

"*Apple-pie!*"

I laughed—the word came out with such an earnest accent of sincerity.

"And chocolate cake," I added. "We mustn't be too highbrow in our austerity. I do love chocolate cake."

"Well," said Christopher, "we have, between us, mentioned as wholesome a diet as anyone could desire."

"And delicious," I went on, still under the spell of our antiphonal rhythm.

"And entirely blameless and beautiful," Christopher concluded.

"With perhaps now and then some fish or a chicken," I added reasonably.

"I very much hope you're not going to take the attitude of the traditional housewife," Christopher recommenced by and by, leaning back and lighting a cigarette, "that I must 'keep to my own sphere,' that there are certain things I'm 'not supposed to know about.' "

" 'Traditional' nowadays is only another term for 'old-fashioned,' " I replied, "and nobody wants to be that any more. You're perfectly wel-

come to know all about the mysteries of the kitchen."

"It was ridiculous, wasn't it?" Christopher mused, "to divide life up so accurately—one distinct realm for the woman and another for the man. Just as if men and women were not created to share things."

"If they happen to want to," I put in.

"Yes," replied Christopher with a nice glance. "That's where we're fortunate."

"And since we want to," I went on glowingly in a moment, "and since it suits our philosophy, we're going to do it regardless of all the traditions that may still persist. You may sometimes (not always) wash the dishes for me, and I shall sometimes (not always either) hoe the potatoes for you. Oh, Christopher!" I paused while the great realization broke over me again. "We're home—we're safe—we're free!"

"You went off on a new tack there," said Christopher after another of those deep looks which I mentioned at the close of my first chapter, "but it's easy to follow you. After all, I guess, in spite of our inability to fall in with current enthusiasms, we are as much the children of our age as anyone else. The spirit of freedom's got hold of us too. Only instead of prompting us to march in proces-

sions or organize societies, it has driven us backward and inward, to strip off inessentials and get down to naked realities."

"To that which we're sure of," I added.

"Yes," Christopher mused; "yes. I'm tired of pretending I'm wise enough to know what the world ought to do, whether Bolshevism is good or bad, whether or not we ought to join the League of Nations. I'm not wise enough, I don't know, and I shrewdly suspect that most people are in my condition. But, somehow, since the war began, we've all felt that we must make up our minds on every tremendous subject. It's been a great strain, and the loss of humility hasn't been good for us."

"That's true," I admitted gravely.

"Of course these questions have got to be decided," Christopher went on, "and I don't want to run away and pass the buck. But there's too much clamor, everybody is talking at once, somebody really must keep still awhile."

"And give God a chance?" I suggested.

"Maybe." Christopher nodded. "Maybe, if we all kept still, we'd hear an authentic Voice telling us what to do next. Certainly we shall never hear it if we don't grow humble again."

"Little children."

"Yes."

By this time the spring dusk was filling the corners of our old dining-room and the goodnight notes of robins were heard through the open windows.

"Do you realize how long we've sat here?" I asked.

Christopher grinned.

"What if Bridget had been waiting to clear the table!" he said. "She'd have been in and out twenty times, fidgeting until we were routed."

"Oh! we *are* free, aren't we?" I commented, with a long, luxurious sigh. "And now, since there are so few dishes, I'll just rinse and stack them and wash them tomorrow morning."

"That's the right spirit," approved Christopher.

Lighting another cigarette, he helped me clear the table and put the kitchen in order; then I went out and helped him bring in the hoe and wheelbarrow. After that, we sat on the front steps and looked across the valley, glimmering now in the early starlight.

I had had my first lesson in simplicity and had learned it so easily that I thought I had written it myself.

IV

THE H. C. of L. was less explanatory in its methods than Christopher, but it was quite as emphatic. I felt its influence from the first, but for a long time I did not understand how beneficent it was. In fact it enabled me to repeat the piquant experience of shock and surprise I had undergone when I discovered that I really did not want another Bridget.

In the city, out of touch with raw materials, I had had only the vaguest idea of the significance of the familiar initials; but in the country, buying and cooking my food myself, I understood why people everywhere made such a fuss about them. And I proceeded to augment the fuss. Why, of course! Some reactions are so inevitable that one does not even have to take the trouble to think about them.

"Dear, dear! this is all wrong," I said, frowning over the grocer's slips. "Why, I'm sure I remember that Bridget used to get three pounds of butter for a dollar." Loudly I joined in all the protesting discussions my neighbors held. The

state of affairs was intolerable. What were we going to do about it? How long would it last?

Meantime, I studied cook books and made a collection of recipes filched from all sorts of journals (my literary taste was enlarging under the stimulus of my new interest), and learned how to prepare meals that cost relatively very little and pleased us amply well.

Then one day, when we were lingering over one of my economical desserts (lingering, mind you, because it was good, not for the contrary reason), Christopher's eye fell on a paragraph in the daily paper from which he was reading me scraps and he sang out:

"Here's good news for you. Food prices are about to drop appreciably."

I applauded heartily, as every reason—objective and subjective—seemed to bid me applaud. Then I sat silent, eating my pudding and marvelling at something in my heart which I did not understand.

"What's the matter?" asked Christopher by and by, regarding me curiously.

I pushed back my plate and looked up and met Christopher's eyes; my own, I am sure, were full of perplexity.

"I don't know," I answered. "Of course it's absurd—there's some mental quirk which escapes

me—but when you read that about falling prices, my—why, my heart fell too. It's utterly grotesque. You haven't noticed any signs of derangement about me lately, have you?"

Christopher continued to gaze at me a moment, then he threw back his head and laughed in a manner which I found both bewildering and reassuring.

"You funny woman!" he said. "You've outdone yourself, you've broken your own record. And you haven't the least idea of it either. The truth of the matter is that you like the H. C. of L.!"

I was more shocked than when he had told me I didn't want a cook.

"But—but, Christopher!" I gasped helplessly.

"Yes, you do," he insisted. "And now that I've noticed it, I'm not surprised; I only wonder I didn't see it long ago. For the thing's perfectly rational in you. The H. C. of L. holds you right down to the business of learning your lesson of simplicity and practicing it. Whereas, without it, your old luxurious habits might give you trouble. You're grateful to the H. C. of L., and you have every sensible reason for being so."

"But how utterly, hatefully selfish in me!" I

murmured after a moment of stricken introspection.

"Oh, I don't mean that if you had a chance to abolish the H. C. of L., you'd vote for its continuance," Christopher comforted me. "You'd remember how many other people are suffering because of it. Our reactions aren't always simple, you know. It's possible to like a thing for oneself and hate it for all the rest of the world."

"Not quite all the rest of the world in this case," I went on presently, following out the new line of thought which had opened before me. "There must be many people like you and me who, whether they know it or not, are the better and happier for the H. C. of L."

"Of course," Christopher nodded. "And if God's in His heaven (as I suppose He still is, after all), the H. C. of L. is probably one of His best snails on the thorn."

"Christopher," I replied earnestly, "that's a very significant and illuminating remark."

"It's hard on the others though," I resumed after yet another pause of meditation, "all those who really can't get enough to eat. How long do you suppose it's going to take us to learn?"

Christopher sighed.

"We're an extravagant nation. We have

always eaten too much and thrown too much away. Habits are hard to break. But we make a beginning when we realize our indebtedness to the H. C. of L. You've made a beginning today. Why don't you stop condoling with your neighbors over prices and take to congratulating them?"

We both smiled at the thought of the sensation I should produce:

"Good morning, Mrs. Wood. Isn't it fine that oranges are so expensive? We shall all of us have to confine ourselves to prunes and baked apples, and thus we shall be a step nearer the ultimate beauty of simplicity."

"Well," I concluded, "I may have made a beginning, but the very nature of it shows that I don't trust myself. I ought to love simplicity so securely that prices have nothing whatever to do with my faithful following."

"You do in your heart," Christopher replied; "and as soon as you get rid of your old habits, you'll be all right. Just at present, you're rather self-conscious and experimental, and that's dangerous. Simplicity's got to become second nature with you."

"But then I shan't realize it and so shan't enjoy it," I expostulated.

"I wonder." Christopher recognized the point

and felt it as keenly as I did, for we were both savoring the new beauty and dignity which our life had acquired since we began eliminating superfluities. "There was Saint Francis and there was Thoreau. They both lived austerely and never lost their zest. Think of Saint Francis's praise of Lady Poverty, and think of Thoreau's enthusiasm over beans! No, I believe, when things are nakedly good and true, you never lose your appreciation of their beauty. However, it might be as well to make the most of our present awareness."

Which we proceeded to do.

Thoreau and Saint Francis were two of the people whom my post-war experience had most warmly endeared to me. I thought of them often as I went about my work. Some ten years ago there had been a real Franciscan cult in America (aesthetic, not religious), and I had embraced it. Now, for the first time, my life was remotely approximating its standard. Very remotely, Saint Francis would have said, regarding my comfortable, spacious, well-equipped house and my chocolate cake. Absurdly luxurious Thoreau would have found the variety of viands I set before Christopher. But the point was that I did approximate. Before the war, I, with the rest of the sponsors of the "Simple Life," had merely admired and

envied (so we said) and had done nothing about it. The state of mind had been one of which I had always felt vaguely ashamed. Nor had I cause for complacency now, since circumstance rather than stalwart decision had prompted my first real attempts at discipleship. But I did not care about being complacent; I was content to be humbly grateful that at last I was in the way of simplicity. Perhaps later, if I deserved it, I might have a chance to prove my stamina.

It was even more beautiful than I had thought it, this business of simplification: there was such freedom about it, such peace, such solidity. It removed the confusion of life and swept the horizon clear; it left plenty of room for the few big interests. Can it be that there are people who prefer confusion to clarity, who like crowded horizons better than ample ones? It would seem that there must be, since crowds and confusion persist. But perhaps most of these people are as helpless as I was (or seemed to be) before circumstance gave me a boost. We are all helpless, if the truth were told, caught in strange vortices of tradition, swept by tides of habit. We seldom know clearly just what we want and almost never where we are going and what we ought to do. Blind, blind is the human race. Probably, at bottom, the

recent war was a product of sheer blindness, unimagined and unintended in its enormity. We all blundered into it and then could not get out. In like manner we blundered through the Peace Conference, even our great Wilson somewhat losing his way. There are always "so many sides to a question" and human wisdom is so very fallible. How shall one take account of all forces and render to every man his due? We are still blundering. Russia and Ireland, Persia, Egypt and India, Mexico, Japan—how crassly we deal with them! Shall we never get our eyes open and see and learn and understand? What will help us?

Simplicity. It is a golden answer, springing confidently from the heart of one human experience which cannot be fundamentally different from that of the rest of mankind. Oh! not that I would necessarily have Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd George and M. and Mme. Poincaré do their own housework and eat corn meal mush. Great principles are single, but their methods of application may be many and various. I would only have the corn meal mush of politics seriously experimented with. Simplification, clarification, humiliation: those are untried slogans. And why should the affairs and relations of states be on a different scale and

governed by different standards from those that have been found beneficial among private citizens?

After all, in the long run, Messrs. Lloyd George and Wilson and Harding and Poincaré are potent only as we, the common people, allow them to be so; they must obey our will. Therefore perhaps it will follow that if we individually become thoroughly, resolutely sincere and simple and genuine, our governments will become so too.

"Oh, men and women, come out, come away!" It was thus that I generally ended a meditation like that suggested above. Frequently, sitting on the doorstep, I mentally made the ascent of Green Peak in order that I might the more effectively launch my voice toward all whom it might concern. (Christopher laughed at me for thus using Green Peak as a soap box.) "We are in a most hideous muddle these days; we don't know what we are doing or what we ought to do. Come out, come away! Let us be still awhile and get rid of everything that hampers us. Let us listen. Then perhaps, by and by, we can take hopeful counsel together. Come out, come away!"

V

FOR how many discoveries was the Great War responsible! Mr. Wilson discovered the Fourteen Points, Mr. H. G. Wells discovered God, and I, in my far humbler sphere, discovered my kitchen.

They, my betters, could not contain themselves in the matter of the revelations which had been granted them, they could talk of little else; and, in like manner, I was possessed to talk of my kitchen. In season and out of season, to sympathetic and to indifferent ears,I prated of the novel joys of cooking.

It is said that trained theologians and even a good many just ordinary Christians smiled in their sleeves at the naïve effusions of "God, the Invisible King"; and I am sure my country neighbors had many a hearty laugh behind my back when I had finished telling them about my muffins and gingerbread. From my excitement, one might have supposed that I had invented all recipes, that I and no one else had discovered the wisdom of starting

gingerbread in a cold oven, that I and none before me had learned the various adaptabilities of corn starch. But, just as Mr. Wells set certain other people thinking along lines which they had never followed before, so I flatter myself I jogged the imaginations of some of my friends.

"Well, now tell me what you have been doing," said one of the summer cottagers, newly returned, when she had made an end of narrating the social and civic activities which had occupied her during the winter.

"I?" I sat up and felt my face kindle; I was even absurdly aware that my voice vibrated. "Well, just before I came over to see you, I took three loaves of bread out of the oven. They smelt delicious. Their tops were brown and crusty, and their sides were tender. I hope—I think—I believe they were very good."

"Bread?" My friend was taken aback. "I'm afraid that means that you have no maid yet. But you can buy bread at the store."

She did not understand. Why should she?

"But bread-making is the best fun of all," I went on earnestly, "because it is the most fundamental and necessary. It is symbolic. I'd rather make bread than anything else. No, we have no maid and we're not going to have one."

"Is there really none to be had?"

My friend was sympathetic. Still she did not understand.

"Yes, we could have had one." Then I decided it was time I enlightened her. "You see, something has happened to me; I've been converted, I've seen a great light. I've discovered that the kitchen is the most interesting room in the house, and that nothing is quite so much fun as cooking."

For a long time, as I unfolded my topic, my friend remained incredulous. Probably, like everyone else, she thought me a little mad. And, naturally, my past record stood in my way. But genuine enthusiasm carries conviction with it; and by and by, as I continued to talk, I saw her eyes kindle with a doubtful sort of response.

"You almost convince me," she said; "but I still don't in the least understand. I thought you hated cooking, I thought you had tried it once and had made a complete failure of it. Do you mean to tell me that suddenly now you can do it and do it well?"

I nodded.

"It's conversion," I re-explained. "It's a changed point of view. That makes all the difference. Oh! if I didn't have so much to say about puddings and soufflés nowadays I could hold forth

at length on the abstract theme of the point of view. No, it's not bromidic; you needn't look bored. Platitudes aren't bromidic. They're the deep wisdom of the race with which our somewhat too garrulous parents insist that we shall all be endowed in our cradles, but from which life protects us until we are able to deal with them. Then suddenly we discover them as unsuspected treasures lying right under our eyes, as significant pictures taking shape out of a blind tangle of lines. They come to us with all the humor and surprise of something which we have complacently supposed ourselves to have outgrown. Chastening and illuminating experience! Two months ago I'd have looked bored too, if someone had told me that the point of view makes a great difference; but now I want to tell everyone that it's true, it's true."

My friend laughed.

"It's lucky for you that a belief in miracles is coming into fashion again. Otherwise, you'd never get anyone in the world to believe you. But I'm interested. Mary Jane's wages are increasing alarmingly. Perhaps I'll come over some morning and watch you at work."

She spoke of course in entire innocence and sincerity; but if she had taken counsel with some imp

of malice, she could not have made a neater thrust at my weakest point. It brought me tumbling from my high horse.

"Alas!" I confessed. "I can't work unless I'm entirely alone."

"Ah?" She lifted her eyebrows. "That sounds as if you didn't work easily."

"It does," I admitted. "And yet I believe the unsociable trait is common to cooks. I know all our Bridgets had it. Not one of them really welcomed me to the kitchen when she was busy there. Poor things! They couldn't frankly turn me out as I turn out people who get in my way; they could only sulk. I tell you, my retrospective understanding of our various Bridgets increases every day."

My friend shook her head, skeptical again.

"I don't want to do anything on such a desperate edge of suspense that I can't bear to have anyone in the same room. No, I guess I'll go without new shoes and a new hat and keep Mary Jane awhile longer."

That "desperate edge of suspense" sounded well, it was a telling phrase; but it did not quite seem to fit my case as I pondered it in my kitchen that night when I was getting supper. Certainly I was in no suspense then, and there were no edges to my mood; but I knew that if the door were to

open and anyone save Christopher were to enter (when was Christopher ever *de trop*?), I should bristle with inner expostulation: "Please go away, go away!" What was the real reason for this unsociability? As it adumbrated itself before me, I knew it for something positive and vital, rooted in common sense; and as it began to take shape, it brought an unexpected vision of the library across my imagination. Of course, that was it: in the library, reading or writing, I could not bear to be interrupted, and nobody dreamed of intruding on me without at least an apology. That was because I was absorbed in what I was doing, entirely given over to my book or my pen. Well, I was likewise absorbed in the kitchen, wholly intent; and when I was interrupted I suffered a shock of recall and distraction which was demoralizing. People did not understand this, and so they came breezily bursting in upon me without compunction or warning. "What are you doing? Making a cake? Can I help? No? Then I'll just sit down and talk to you a few minutes." As if a cake were not a very jealous god!

Jealous: again, that was it. The kitchen was jealous, it wanted my whole attention and devotion and when our harmonious *solitude à deux* was infringed on, it filled the air with resentment. Not

I alone was responsible for the silent protest which made itself felt when our dear company of two was crowded by a third. A real affair of the heart, with all its traditional ear marks, was intriguing the kitchen and me.

Thus, to my exoneration, did I reason the matter out and forgive myself; but the fact that I needed exoneration was damaging, and I am afraid I was guilty of a good deal of apparent rudeness that first summer of my domesticity. Tactful hostesses who do their own housework should make their guests "feel at home" by letting them share in the daily tasks. "Now give me an apron and set me to work": that was only a decent and friendly demand, and I was ashamed of myself that my heart sank to hear it. Several times I acceded and, after pointing out the habitations of the mixing bowl and the egg beater, the sugar, the flour, the salt, the spoons, tried to cooperate in the business of getting the next meal; but always something went wrong—the cake fell or it burned, the potatoes were under-done, the soup was too thick —and inevitably, as a matter of course, the genius of the kitchen deserted me. The scope and dignity of its function prevented it from being small-souled, but its strength and decision of character enabled it to insist on having its own way. So, by

and by, I grew frank in my turn and said to my guests, "I'm awfully sorry, it's horrid in me, but I have to cook alone. Take a book and go out in the garden, and I'll come as soon as I can."

Sometimes I felt a little uneasy about the hold which the kitchen had on me. After all, there were other interests and duties in life; was I not in danger of losing touch with them? But a certain element of fatefulness in the situation always persuaded me to acquiescence. This was the present chapter which life was giving me to read.

That being so, I read it deliberately and made the most of the healing reassurance I found in it. When I had worked in the kitchen before, I had hurried to get through my tasks and escape. Now I took not only plenty of time but all the time there was, and I refused to hurry save at certain critical moments when haste was imperative. The difference was marked. I have always thought hurry a most demoralizing thing. And, after all, why hurry through work you enjoy?

It was a good summer. As I sat at the kitchen table or moved back and forth over the wide, restful spaces of the linoleum floor, I pondered many things. The soul of the kitchen was my constant companion and I was never unaware of it, but I did not always remain with it within its blue and white

walls. Sometimes we wandered together far on the wings of the salt and pepper, rice and cinnamon and tea and other commonplace things we were handling. Paths to all the ends of the earth started from the cupboard. Then when we came back with a rush (perhaps because I had found a spider in the spinach) we rejoiced to look up and find the orchard gazing in at the door and the garden at the window and the kettle beginning to sing on the stove. Life was sweet, after all; yes, in spite of the war and the Peace Conference, it was sweet and promising. The war was over and, since people were everywhere hungry, they must soon forget their enmities in order to help one another eat. The Peace Conference was over too, and would not the same universal hunger bring about an inevitable modification of the vengeful treaty? Perhaps, at bottom, wars and councils are not so vastly determining as they suppose, and it is always in kitchens and orchards and gardens that real human history works itself out. This last thought was the keynote of my sober gladness.

VI

IN the last chapter I mentioned the fact that my literary taste was enlarging under the stimulus of my new interest. The development formed one of the most delightful phases of my new freedom.

Before the war, I am afraid I had been rather fastidious in my book preferences. There is no snob more offensive than your intellectual snob (unless, indeed, it be the religious variety), and, realizing this, I had always been ashamed to confess how many popular books bored me. But the truth remained that the scope of my enthusiasm had been limited. Now suddenly, with a leap, I came to a full, amazing appreciation of values which had simply never existed for me before. The popular magazines revealed themselves as the treasure mines they are, advertisements ceased to be negligible, and even "soap order" catalogues spoke a new, gracious tongue.

All people who live in the country know what soap order catalogues are. The neighbors' chil-

dren come around with them two or three times a year, asking you—so the formula runs—if you want to "sign." The idea is that you shall permit the children to order for you anything, everything, from soap to diamond earrings, and that the firm represented shall then bestow on said children their corresponding choice of anything, everything, from plush rocking-chairs to paper dolls. Having a fairly conscientious sense of civic responsibility, I have all my life made a point of signing soap orders; but in my unregenerate days, I used to be careless and stupid about it, not making an intelligent choice—with the result that we were perpetually overstocked with boraxine and safety matches.

This year, however, the whole transaction presented itself to me in a new light. In the first place, I was not in a hurry to get back to my desk or to a book; I had plenty of leisure and time to attend to the small girl, hopefully applying at the kitchen door. In the second place, when my eyes fell on the familiar catalogue, they, for the first time in their experience, found pasture there. A new language opened new worlds to me. "Aluminum saucepan," "magic dishcloth," "lightning egg beater": what stimulating phrases! "Come in,"

I said to the little girl. "Yes, indeed, I shall be very glad to sign an order for you."

In the end, I had to send her away, bidding her return later in the day; for I simply could not take my bearings at once in the midst of all the alluring possibilities of that once neglected catalogue. With my elbows on the kitchen table and my head in my hands, I sat lost to the world for the better part of an hour, weighing the respective merits of this and that cooking utensil and this and that new variety of food.

"What have you got there? A new *Atlantic*?" asked Christopher, coming over from the studio to see what made me so little in evidence this morning.

"No, indeed!" I looked up glowingly, not meaning to cast any slur on *The Atlantic* by the nature of my reply, but, nevertheless, speaking from my heart. "It's a soap order catalogue, Christopher, and I never read anything so irresistible. Would it be extravagant to buy a few new skillets and saucepans? Bridget left some of ours so badly burned. And what do you think this new cereal would taste like? Listen. I'll read you the description."

Christopher listened with a droll expression of amusement and reflection; his eyes danced into mine.

"O tempora! o mores!" he said. "The next thing I know I shall find you reading *The Welcome Guest.*"

He was perfectly right there. *The Welcome Guest* was a quite unspeakable monthly publication to which I had subscribed at the wistful instigation of another neighbor's child. It cost twenty-five cents a year, and its contents were entirely what one might expect. Its stories were mush and melodrama and all its advertisements began, "Now don't send a penny!" When, at the beginning of every month, it unblushingly arrived arm in arm with *The Atlantic Monthly,* I had always made haste to consign it to the scrap-basket. Its prolonged presence on the library table was unthinkable.

But now! but now! yes, Christopher was right. When the July number arrived, I opened it and carried it out to the kitchen and sat down to see if it contained any recipes. It did of course. There was one for nut bread which sounded so good that I proceeded at once to try it; and when Christopher praised the result and I confessed the source of my inspiration, we laughed merrily.

"Oh, Christopher! I am free!" I burst out in the habitual comment which was becoming a real refrain with me. "Free from all sorts of old preju-

dices, free to browse anywhere anyone browses and like anything anyone likes. What a prison I lived in when I read only 'literature'! I feel immensely indebted to *The Welcome Guest.*"

As for the cook book which arrived with my consignment of soap order products, I should like to recommend it to all the world of housewives. It cost only thirty-five cents, and it contained a better collection of recipes than any of the costlier and more pretentious books with which, from time to time in our family history, we had supplied our various Bridgets.

"What a delicious dish!" said two of our friends, supping with us for the first time after their return from a long sojourn in Paris. "It's so subtle and racy. Did some French chef confide the rule to you?"

"No," I replied demurely, "it's a soap order product."

The incident seemed to me typical of the whole racy and subtle triumph of the commonplace, the lowly and humble, which Christopher and I were celebrating that summer.

Nevertheless, an occasional experience pulled me up short with a challenge which set me wondering whether my taste might not be deteriorating.

One day, for instance, I was reading a new

novel (distinctly "literature" for its part) and found myself deeply interested in a certain chapter which dealt with the post-marital history of the heroine. She had married unexpectedly, taking all her friends by surprise; and, as soon as the news was known, a bevy of older women flocked to give her advice. "It's a good plan to boil up your dish-cloth in your skillet." "Always remember that egg and cheese combinations must cook slowly." "If your bread won't rise, set the pan in warm water." I read these paragraphs absorbedly. They seemed to me full of the most pertinent wisdom. What a fortunate bride to receive such good counsel! and what a fortunate reader was I to be gleaning it after her! Then I turned the page and experienced a memorable shock. Out flashed the author's face at me from between her clever lines, and into my startled mind leaped the realization that I had not been intended to take the foregoing conversation seriously, that she, the author, had been poking fun (gentle, tolerant, large-minded fun, but still fun) at the group of women for being so prosy and commonplace. Respectful admiration was the last tribute she had desired from the reader.

It was rather a bitter moment, for of course there are few discoveries more humiliating than

that of one's own failure to discover a humorous intention. My cheeks burned. But presently I carried the issue, novel and all, out to the studio, and there Christopher and I discussed it.

"Is there a real intellectual danger in finding the affairs of the kitchen as important as any other affairs?" I asked.

Christopher pondered. (He always ponders before he answers questions, and the habit is a good one—except when I want his judgment on a new hat, then it fills me with dismay.)

"No, I think not," he said presently. "They are important if life itself is important, and the only way to redeem them from the obloquy which we have allowed to be cast upon them is to dignify them. But they're not more important than anything else; they're the means, not the end. I think perhaps you're in danger of letting the kitchen monopolize you."

"I'm afraid you're right," I sighed dolefully. "Yes, I guess, as usual, you're right, Christopher. I've been suspecting the danger myself, but I haven't wanted to face it. Very well: I'll begin the process of emancipation tomorrow."

I spoke so soberly that Christopher laughed.

"Hard lines!" he sympathized. "Especially

when it's your new-found freedom from which you must now seek emancipation."

"Isn't that just like life?' I protested. "Paradox crowns paradox, and every truth seems only too anxious to defeat itself."

"So that one always has to keep fighting," commented Christopher.

"Well, I suppose it's a good fight," I ventured after a few thoughtful moments. "The fight for freedom. The very incessancy of it keeps the spirit alert. My kitchen gave me my freedom; now I suspect it of an insidious tendency to enslave me in its turn. It must be circumvented. Yes, I'll begin tomorrow."

I sighed again and went back to the kitchen where I spent all the rest of the day, baking and brewing and stewing and having a glorious time. My intention, I told myself, was to clear the way for a new program tomorrow; but really it was to make the most of my present servitude.

VII

AS a matter of fact, my dealings with my kitchen fell naturally into three divisions. First, I had to learn how to cook at all. Second, I had to learn how to cook easily. Third, I had to learn how to cook and do anything else.

The first two divisions merged rather imperceptibly into each other. By dint of doing only a few things at a time and doing them frequently, I soon acquired a repertoire of recipes which I knew by heart. If I were to draw up a list of suggestions for the beginning housewife, one of the chief of them would be: get your rules by heart. It is disturbing and hampering to have to stop in the middle of the preparation of a dish and run to the cook book to find out what you must do next. The art of cooking, as possibly the art of living in general, lies in freedom and confidence. I never allowed myself to take on more than one or two new recipes at a time and tried to be as severe with myself in the matter of consulting the cook book as I used to be when I was studying Latin and

had a tendency to look up the same word in the lexicon half a dozen times. This was of course not easy, since the tendency was inherent. One particular recipe for graham bread memorized itself almost automatically except for the single item of salt, and there it baffled me repeatedly. Half a teaspoon, a quarter of a teaspoon: which? And it makes a difference how much or how little salt one puts in a dish. But even this point I mastered in time and learned to make graham bread with positive abandon.

The second and third divisions, however, of my kitchen experience were sharply defined, and my graduation from one into the other was difficult. The kitchen itself did all it could to hinder me.

I had never known such a wilful apartment. Vaguely uneasy I had become during the long summer weeks which I had spent at the sink or the bread board or hovering over the stove, realizing more and more clearly the force and decision of the personality which had me in hand, realizing also the fullness of my own response. But I had not dreamed the invisible net was being cast and folded so tight about me. When, in recognition of the wisdom of Christopher's warning, I decided to leave the kitchen and spend the most of the morning

in the shamefully neglected garden, I found that I simply could not do it.

But, no, the discovery was not so direct and immediate as that sounds; the kitchen was too clever.

I washed the breakfast dishes and put them in the rack to drain; then I took off my apron and started for the door. It was half-past eight, the preparation of dinner ought not to take me more than an hour; what a good long spell of weeding I could have! But at the corner of the kitchen table I paused. I had neglected to wipe off some crumbs and some splashes of milk left from the getting of breakfast. A return to the sink and a few passes with the damp dishrag rectified this omission, and again I essayed departure. "Hadn't you better look at the bread board in the pantry?" a small, deprecating voice breathed in my inner ear. Of course! There had been mice in the pantry lately, and I was trying to be careful to leave no crumbs of food about. Once more I returned to the sink for the dishrag and betook myself to the pantry.

Now the pantry is a delightful spot. Its window opens to the south and looks into a cool green arbor in summer and straight into the mildly glowing heart of the low sun in winter. It smells of fresh bread and spices and coffee and all sorts of

pleasant things. Though an integral part of the kitchen, it seems to possess an explicit soul of its own. It received me cheerfully this morning. "Oh, there you are! I knew you'd be coming soon to try that new recipe for spice cookies. You're in the nick of time, for the robins in the arbor are trying to get their last brood off the nest and you can watch them as you work."

I hesitated, but in spite of the proverb, I was not immediately lost; for there were some cup cakes left over for supper; and the cookies could wait. The young robins were a temptation—say, rather, an excuse—but, no, I removed the crumbs from the bread board and turned away.

The kitchen was chagrined at this failure, it had evidently counted on my prompt capitulation. There was a note of impatience in the tone with which it once more called me back from the door. "What a housewife! You've forgotten to fill the tank of the oil heater. It will burn out in no time; then your wick will be charred, and moreover you won't have any hot water to wash your hands when you come in from that ridiculous garden."

I could not deny the relevancy of this reminder nor be ungrateful for it. For the third time I turned back, and this time, in view of the nature of my impending task, I resumed my apron. As I did

so, I seemed to hear the kitchen give a stir and a chuckling sigh of satisfaction. "Oh! it's only for a moment," I flung back over my shoulder at it as I headed for the oil can in the wood-shed.

Having my apron on, however, and perceiving that the wick of the oil heater needed rubbing, I thought I might as well take another minute and a half to secure a clear flame. So I opened the broom closet door to get a cleaning rag, and there I was confronted with such a pile of dish towels that I knew there could be no others left anywhere in the house. All in need of boiling up? Alas! yes, or they would not have been thus cast aside. Well, then, if I expected to have anything with which to dry my dinner glass and silver, I must get this pile into hot soapy water and over the fire at once. I hauled them out of their basket and into the dish-pan and set them to boil.

How about the garden now? Was it worth while to get my hands as dirty as I always get them when weeding if, in half an hour, I should have to stop and clean them up again in order to rinse the dish towels? No, I had much better wait. After all, it was only nine o'clock; the morning was still young. And, while I was waiting, I might as well make a rice pudding for dinner; that would save time.

One hour later, Christopher came over from the studio, remonstrance in his face.

"Here! I thought you were going to keep out of the kitchen this morning," he said.

I turned around from the bread board where, after all, I was cutting out cookies.

"H'sh!" I temporized. "One of the young robins is just about to fly. I—I—why, yes, I was, Christopher; but, you see, one thing after another happened, and I—really, I couldn't help it."

"You don't seem very sorry."

"No," I confessed.

"Well, I think you ought to be. Aren't you ashamed, you a mature, intelligent woman, to be a slave to a mere room?"

"There's nothing very mere about these cookies, anyway, Christopher," I replied beguilingly. "It's a capital recipe. Wait. I'll get you one. Ah! don't scold me or laugh at me. I know—it's been a failure. But, at least, I've got my eyes open to it and I think I know how it happened. I'll try again tomorrow."

Christopher could not help agreeing with me that the cooky recipe was excellent, and he went back to the studio without another word.

The next morning I took special pains to see that the kitchen was in order—crumbs brushed,

stoves filled, towels hung to dry—before I removed my apron. Then I took it off with a rush and went straight out into the garden.

It was a lovely morning. The dew was just dried from the grass, and the midsummer air was full of freshness and fragrance. Robins were hopping over the lawn, a red-eyed vireo was "preaching" in one of the maple trees. The garden was blooming sweetly. Tall spires of blue larkspur stood out against the orchard background, and some white peonies lingered; the mallows and hollyhocks were in their prime. As for the weeds—! I surveyed them, ashamed, and, dropping on my knees by a forest of them, went vigorously to work.

For fifteen minutes, I had every appearance, to myself and to whom it might concern—the robins and vireos perhaps—of absolute contentment. I worked with real zest, and my articulate thoughts congratulated me: "How good it is to be outdoors again! After all, I've missed it. It was high time I broke away. How sweet the air is, how pleasant the sun, and what a heavenly light on the hills!" But of course the effect of one's articulate thoughts is nothing compared with the power of the hidden, silent processes that go on beneath one's consciousness, and not all the congratulations

in the world could give me the peace of mind which I seemed to have that morning. I was uneasy, divided; without looking at it to recognize it, I was blindly keeping something at bay. By and by I realized that the specious blitheness of my mood had ceased to parade itself and that I was working tensely, using my weeding fork as a foil. So then, as I hate division of being, I sat back on my heels and took counsel with myself. What was the matter? Why was I not wholly given over to the sun and the wind and the soil as one should be when gardening? I brushed a lock of hair from my eyes with an impatient and—considering the state of my hands—a highly damaging gesture.

The summer hills would have seemed to be my natural counsellors in this predicament (like the psalmist, I have always been wont to lift up my eyes), but it was not toward them that my gaze travelled as I waited on enlightenment. Rather, it was, by way of the flower beds and the lawn, inevitably, irresistibly, toward the kitchen window. I had left it open and now I found I could look in as far as the kitchen table, could see the dishes I had set to drain (they must be dry by this time) and the basket of vegetables Christopher had brought in from the garden. Beans: were those beans? Well, I must be sure to cook them a little

longer than the other day when they were not so tender as they should have been. What time had I started them then? And what time was it now? Perhaps, for the sake of safety, I had better go and glance in at the kitchen window, first to make sure they were beans in truth, and second to consult the kitchen clock.

Safety, forsooth! Ironical term! As I stood, looking in at the window, with my weeding fork dangling from my hand, I knew myself to be in an extremity of danger. The kitchen clock tried to save me by emphasizing the fact that it was only half-past nine. But I did not turn away from its pointing hands and warning bell as I should have done. Instead, I continued to stand gazing in at the window. How cool and quiet it was in there! The garden was lovely and fragrant, yes; but the mounting sun seemed to promise a hot day. Moreover, though weeding is an admirable occupation, the physical attitude it imposes is certainly fatiguing. It would be pleasant to sit for awhile in a chair and, say, peel potatoes.

Potatoes! Why, come to think of it, there were none prepared for dinner; and neither had I so much as decided what I should have for dessert. Since the day was warm, something cool would be acceptable—gelatine, for instance. But gelatine

ought to be made early and set in the refrigerator. What if I went in and made it now? I dropped my weeding fork.

Among all the welcomes which my kitchen has from time to time given me, none lives more sweetly in my memory than that morning's reception. As I stood in the doorway and looked in, my heart went out to it. It did not triumph too much, it simply welcomed, opening all its shaded orderly spaces to my inhabiting. How infinitely restful it looked after what I was now pleased to think of as the heat and glare of the garden, how immensely simplified after all those weeds! I washed my hands too thoroughly to think of returning to the flower beds and did not leave the kitchen again until dinner was ready.

But Christopher took me gravely to task for this second failure.

"No," he replied to my feeble protest (of, "After all, why not?"), "if man shall not live by bread alone, neither, surely, ought woman to live in a mixing bowl. In fact, it seems to me that you lose the whole honor and dignity of your cooking unless you make some spiritual use of the life which your bread nourishes. You don't want to forget how to read, do you—or to write—or to pray and meditate?"

"I do the last two things in the kitchen," I interpolated.

"Well, honestly,"—he held his point—"I do think you're in danger (perhaps we both are) of a narrowing down of interest which is quite a different thing from simplicity. I don't know how you're going to manage it, but I advise you to conquer that kitchen of yours before it's too late."

The advice was sound. I myself had been scenting the peril which lies in dear simplicity. But I never was much of a conqueror and knew I should have scant success in recourse to methods of violence. Persuasion was my line. Could I persuade the kitchen that, in the interests of the fullness of reality which we both had at heart, it must modify its claim on me? A few days later I had a chance to put the matter to the test (rather, it spontaneously put itself) and met with a success which astonished me.

It was a rainy day, warm and still and full of the feeling of growth and fruitfulness. Christopher had headed straight from the breakfast table for the studio, with a creative expression in his eyes which had stirred something in me. I mused over the dishpan and fell into deep meditation before the oil stove.

"See here," I said to the kitchen at last, "this is

a great day for the kind of work I used to do before you 'came into my life.' You remember you gave me the theme of a story the other day? Well, I'd like to go upstairs and write it this morning. Will you let me?"

Behold! I was free. There was no demur, no calling back, no reminding of crumbs or other neglected duties, no suggestions of any kind. No sulking, either. When, at the end of three hours, complete immersion in my long neglected ink bottle, I came to myself with a start and saw that it was time to get dinner, the kitchen received me no less friendlily than usual. It seemed to realize that the new phase on which we had suddenly and tacitly entered was one of new opportunity for it. It would not compete with my study, but would supplement it, supplying just the restful and steadying influence which the rather harassing business of writing needs. It lent itself to my tardy manipulations so efficiently that dinner was made ready in record time.

I cannot account for this consummation on any hard and fast logical grounds, cannot really explain it at all. The facts were that, one day, I had spent the whole morning in the kitchen preparing a simple meal, and that, the next day, spending most of the morning at my desk, I nevertheless pre-

pared as good a dinner as usual and set some early apples to bake into the bargain. Christopher says that I really wanted to write my story, whereas I only half wanted (perhaps not even half) to weed the garden. But, though that accounts for my share of the transaction, it does not explain the kitchen's acquiescence or the mechanical accomplishment of work in one-third of the usual time.

Or, after all, does it? Is there perhaps not really anything mechanical about our human life? Is it all fluid and docile, ready to adapt itself to the demands and purposes of the spirit which animates it? And is that spirit all one and the same, operating in the study, the studio, and the kitchen, with pens and brushes and mixing spoons? So that one has only to desire and purpose intensely enough to accomplish anything one chooses—and everything else at the same time. The speculation throws light on the ancient belief in "Brownies." Perhaps the gracious tribe of little men symbolized a groping realization that man's environment asks nothing better than to help him if it gets a fair, free chance.

However this may be, my kitchen has now ceased to monopolize me; but it remains as good a friend as I have in the world, and I return to it from other occupations with an unfailing sense of

gratification. When other housewives tell me that cooking takes all their time, that they can't do anything else, I reply, "Yes, I know, it will if you let it. But it needn't; believe me, it needn't. Try earnestly enough to do something else too and you'll find that you can. Only try."

VIII

HAS Mr. H. G. Wells found himself on better terms with churchmen and theologians since he discovered God and wrote "God, the Invisible King"? I certainly have found myself on better terms with my neighbors since I discovered my kitchen.

There are several of them, to right and to left and up "the hill road." Though we stand apart from the village, we have a neighborhood. They are mostly farmers' families, Vermonters of the "good old stock," and I have known them so long and so well that I never should have supposed our relationship needed any improving.

And yet perhaps that is not strictly true. As I look back, I seem to remember wondering, in the old days, why I did not more often drop in on this and that neighbor and why she did not more frequently come to see me. Once in a long time my wonderment went so far as to prompt me to a deliberate "dropping" which meant well, which

was wholly sincere, but which never seemed to accomplish what I desired of it.

To begin with, I never went "just as I was," but always saw to it that my hair was in order and my dress presentable. Then, instead of applying at my neighbor's kitchen door, I mounted her front steps. Sometimes, to be sure, my polite knockings fell on deaf rooms and I had, after all, to descend the steps and go around to the rear of the house. But my welcome there, though cordial enough, generally contained an element of embarrassment, sometimes even bordering on consternation. "You couldn't make anyone hear? Dear, dear! that's a shame; I was just finishing up my work and had all the doors shut. Will you go back, or—well, yes, of course, you can come right in this way, but I'm afraid my kitchen's not in very good order. I'm sorry; but, you see, there's always so much to do——"

Here my flushing hostess was apt to break off, looking at me deprecatingly. How should I "see" —I who had Bridget to do all my seeing for me—how should I know anything about it? Fluttering before me, she led me as swiftly as possible through kitchen and dining-room to the apartments of state in the front of the house. There she

snatched off her apron and put a hand to her hair and sat down to receive my call.

What did we talk about? The weather. The health of the neighborhood. The new minister, if there was one. The—the—really, there was little else. In those barren days I was supposed to be too high-minded to care about gossip; perhaps I even deluded myself that I was! It would have been tactless and stupid in me to have introduced the subject of new books, for the chances were that my hostess did not know nor care much about them. Equally futile on her part would have been an account of her recent jelly and pickle making. We shared so little ground in common that we were obliged to tread gingerly, and sometimes only abject repetition saved us from falling into abysmal silences.

No wonder I was not often moved to repeat calls like that!

But as soon as I began to do my own cooking, there came a marked change in my social status, and I woke up to find myself for the first time a thoroughly recognized member of the community. Not having anticipated this and not yet understanding the intensive knowledge which all country neighbors possess of one another's affairs, I was as puzzled as I was pleased by the new friendli-

ness in the faces which paused now and then to greet me over my fence and by the unprecedented familiarity of our easy intercourse. Was it mental telepathy that prompted everyone to address me on culinary themes?

"You see, I'm doing my own housework now," I said one morning, feeling, for my part, that some explanation should be forthcoming in face of my appeal to a passing neighbor on the subject of custard pie.

She gave me a curious look, the look of a polite person who has "heard that story before" and is going to be put to it to laugh spontaneously. Then she decided to be frank. After all, why in the world had she lingered by my gate if not just because she recognized the new bond between us?

"Yes, so I've heard," she stated.

I was surprised. This conversation took place early in the summer. Who could have told her? How could anyone have guessed?

"Dear me!" I ventured. "And do you know that I had to give all my bread dough to Mrs. Rose's chickens the other day because I had scalded the yeast; and that my layer cake frosting hardened so fast that I couldn't get it out of the pan, and we had to chop it up and eat it as candy; and

that I scorched some scalloped potatoes until even the Woods' pig wouldn't touch them?"

Again she hesitated for just the fraction of a second, and I saw in her eyes a brief balance between her old and new attitudes towards me. Then the latter prevailed, and she nodded and laughed. I could straightway have hugged her. The realization that my affairs had been discussed and laughed at in the neighborhood did not annoy me; on the contrary, I found myself immensely flattered by it. Country gossip an offense? Why, it is precisely the highest tribute one's neighbors can give; it proves that one is living interestingly. A warm wave of pleasure broke over me, and I drew a long breath for the sheer delight and wonder of it.

"Would you mind coming into the house," I asked, "and seeing if I've got the dough for my pie crust of the right consistency? The last time it was so tough that poor Christopher could hardly eat it."

There is one point about humility that, so it seems to me, has not been sufficiently indicated in the various homilies on the subject. Unless, indeed, it is wrapt up in the Beatitudes. That is the tremendous social advantage it gives its victim. Superior people are liked, if at all, only in spite of their superiority; and the liking generally has a

string to it. But inferior people call forth the whole-hearted affection of their comrades. Heaven knows there was never anything really superior about me in the old days (Bridget knew there wasn't too, and she treated me accordingly); but my absorption in books and ink bottles and my unconcern for the things of the pantry and the flour barrel kept my neighbors at a distance, gave them no engaging chance to look down on me. How could they then regard me with anything but indifferent respect? Now I was suddenly down where all human beings belong, in the ranks of those who struggle and fail, who must be helped, who have a claim on human sympathy. The difference was revolutionary.

I cannot remember (so spontaneous was the action) whether I first began running in at my neighbors' kitchen doors or whether they first began running in at mine. Just as we were—oh, certainly, yes!—with flour on our sleeves and dough on our finger tips.

"Say, can you lend me a spoonful of soda? I've just found that I'm all out."

"Oh, Mrs. Wood, please tell me: is there nothing one can do with a custard that has separated?"

No more apologies were proffered to me because of disorderly kitchens. Had not everyone

seen (or heard) for herself that my kitchen also was at times in wild confusion? There were no more silences. On the contrary, Mrs. Wood and I found so much to talk about that I invariably outstayed my intention with her and got home too late to put her advice in immediate practice. I was one with them all, I was a country woman, I was a real human being. Moreover, I was an ignorant soul, sadly in need of enlightenment. The result was a social success which I found intoxicating.

Let those frequent brilliant drawing-rooms who will. Wit is there, doubtless, and beauty and mirth and some wisdom. But give me Mrs. Wood's kitchen, with the warm welcome of the two women —mother and grandmother—and the laughter of two dear children and the rapid, spontaneous flow of conversation on themes that matter vitally. Some drawing-room themes matter vitally, too, but many of them do not; and there is all too often about their treatment a certain self-consciousness which impairs them. When people come together for the abstract purpose of talking, they are apt to find but an academic value in what they have to say. Whereas, when they fly together because of a human situation which must be met, a problem solved, a difficulty mastered, their talk is as directly related to life as a flower to its stem.

In drawing-rooms, people think about what they are going to say, shape their phrases beforehand, suppress and embroider. In kitchens, everything at all to the purpose tumbles out pell-mell, but concisely too, in order that time be not lost. Drawing-room conversation is more artistic; kitchen talk is racier, closer to the soil. More universally important too: yes, I think that can fairly be claimed. For drawing-room themes, no matter how important they may be in themselves and therefore ought to appear to everyone, as a fact seem important only to the few who handle them; whereas, kitchen themes are important, and seem very much so, to every human being. Food is sacred. It certainly is; and we may as well get rid of the hypocritical, mock-transcendentalism with which we sometimes profess to scorn it. It is the oil which keeps alight the heaven-kindled flame. (Perhaps, by the way, the Foolish Virgins were mock-transcendentalists.) Oh! lobster salad is not sacred, no; nor *paté de foie gras,* nor terrapin. But bread and milk and fruit and eggs and corn meal mush—the simpler the holier. Food is our daily necessity and is also the symbol of our hospitality, our brotherhood, our religion. Whether they know it or not all people are concerned in discussions between cooks.

All to the good, therefore, was the effect of my

new interest on my relations with my immediate neighbors. But I am afraid some of my village acquaintances ("city people," "summer cottagers") took over a share of the embarrassment which the country people had dropped. Our kitchen is far from the front door, and ceremonious rappings of callers did not always reach my ears. The result was that, now and then, an exquisite vision would appear in the kitchen doorway, inquiring, "I beg your pardon. I couldn't make anyone hear. Can you tell me if Mrs.——" Then a frank stare and a look of confusion and—perhaps, after all, it was I who took over most of the embarrassment. But I always refused to be conquered by it, or even to recognize it. "Come in," I said, removing the apron which contrasted so flatly with the summer costume before me. "Yes, I'm in, as you see, and I'm glad to see you. Come right through to the living room."

Generally, I must confess, the second clause of this remark was a falsehood; for, ten to one, I had a cake in the oven or had only just barely time to get dinner before Christopher's clamorous return from a sketching trip. And summer people, with nothing to do but amuse themselves, have no idea of the value of time. But yet, in another way, I was thoroughly glad. It seemed to me that all

intercourse, all acquaintanceship must be the better for the wholesome, homely touch which a kitchen can communicate. I felt truer friends with my caller for having received her at the back door in an apron.

The social education which my kitchen gave me was not complete until it had revealed to me a neighborhood custom which I had never suspected, but the spontaneous practice of which suddenly urged itself on me as a kind of natural law.

A neighbor had died. He was not a young man and he had been ill for some time; so that the shock was not great. Nevertheless, every death is a shock, and something must be done about it. The year before, my impulse would have carried me into the flower garden and thence to the shadowed door where I would have left my fragrant tribute of sympathy without asking or expecting to see one of the family. But this year, to my surprise, and somewhat to my disgust, my sorrowing thoughts turned not to the garden but to the kitchen, and, instead of wanting to pick flowers, I found myself irresistibly prompted to make a loaf of brown bread. How absurd! how even offensive! I took myself to task for an obsession which was carrying me beyond the bounds of common sense. What should a stricken household, in the first throes of

bereavement, care about brown bread? Almost at once the answer came, marching sturdily out of those fastnesses of life and reality to which, since the war, I seemed to have retreated: "Care? Why, everything! They must eat; they have flocks of relatives coming to them and many things to do. What can they care about taking the time to cook, if you please? Just bake your bread and carry it over and see if they don't care."

Two hours later, I went down the road with my warm, fragrant loaf in my hand. There was something about its mere presence that reassured me so utterly that instead of knocking at the front door, I slipped around to the kitchen and there, without knocking at all, lifted the latch and went in.

The widow was washing dishes. Her face was pale and her eyes were heavy and red, but she had herself in hand. Instinctively I understood that her kitchen was steadying her. One neighbor was mopping the floor, and in the adjoining room I could hear the subdued voices of others at work. On the kitchen table stood a pan of baked beans, an apple pie, a dish of scalloped potatoes, a loaf of chocolate cake. Neighbors had brought them and left them, even as I was about to contribute my loaf of bread. How glad I was of the impulse

which had prompted me to play my rightful part! I set my loaf silently down on the table, and never had any tribute of flowers or written or spoken words done so much for me to express a fullness of sympathy. When I went home, I started another loaf and a pan of biscuits.

It now seems to me, as I meditate on them, that these neighborly customs and impulses are very deep. They spring from the heart of life where that which is common is that which is most true and beautiful. Human aspiration must rise ever higher and higher, but the sap which nourishes the sun-kissed leaves must come from the buried roots. They are all one—roots and leaves, depths and heights: that is the way to state it. And only those parts of the tree do not matter that thrust themselves out wantonly and have to be pruned off. No gardener was ever yet known to prune roots.

That is the great reason why, when trouble comes, common ministrations are best, common succor along basic lines. There is a wise tenderness about them which woos the stricken heart to "go through the motions of life," to mark time bravely until the shock is over and the march can be resumed. Beans and potatoes and brown bread: yes, there is an eloquent help in them beyond the scope of flowers and words.

IX

BUT, much as I owed to my neighbors in the way of counsel and stimulus, there was one point at which, before the summer was over, I found them altogether too stimulating; and the fact proved that I had not wholly lost my old reluctances. Sincerely as I loved to work in the kitchen, I still "drew the line." The development might have given me food for reflection concerning the negative aspect of the afore-mentioned point of view if I had not preferred to think about it as little as possible. The truth was that my neighbors' passion for preserving ("canning" they undiscriminatingly called it) filled me with a dismay which acknowledged the lurking presence of a threat.

The menace made itself felt obscurely, even innocently. Groups of women began to pass the house with pails in their hands, going up the hill road after wild strawberries. Then by and by they came down again, their tired shoulders sagging. What a lot of work! They had walked

miles and had been out for hours in the hot June meadows, stooping and gathering. Now they were on their weary way home. To rest? Not at all. They must hull all those berries and put them up before they lost their freshness. Hundreds and thousands and millions of berries to be hulled and put up. Where had they found the courage for such an exhausting day?

Courage, however, was, disconcertingly, not the quality which looked forth from their tired eyes when, reluctantly but irresistibly impelled, I hailed them across the fence. Rather, it was contented enthusiasm which responded to me.

"Yes, we've had real good luck. Ten quarts apiece, we reckon. How many have you put up?"

I tried to be careless when I answered, "None." I even essayed to convey in my tone a subtle and inoffensive suggestion of superiority. For I honestly thought it was not worth while to work so hard for a few jars of sweets. But my success was not signal. To my annoyance there was a note of apology in my voice.

"Oh, well! there's plenty of berries left," the women reassured me.

Then they nodded and smiled and passed on, leaving me a prey to a kind of panic. "No! no!

I will not, I won't!" I sternly confronted the imp they had raised, and hurried into the house.

Strawberries lasted a long time that year. For two or three weeks the groups of women continued to parade their disquieting pails up and down the hill and I continued to chant my refrain of, "I will not, I won't." I hid in the house when I saw them coming, being both afraid and ashamed to encounter them. It was a curious psychological situation; I had never known anything like it. Finally, one day, I overheard a passing remark to the effect that the strawberry season was about over, and then my refrain changed suddenly to a relieved, "Hurrah!" I emerged from the house and once more faced the world.

My relief was short-sighted however, and that I very soon perceived. For strawberries only usher in the canning season. Swift on their heels come raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, to say nothing of all the garden fruits and vegetables. Two or three days after I had learned that nothing could now oblige—or even permit—me to put up wild strawberries, I unsuspectingly went to Mrs. Wood's to get some eggs and found her dealing with a great basket of greens of some sort, washing and washing (as only greens have to be

washed) and sorting and scalding and packing into glass jars.

"What in the world are you doing?" I asked with a sinking heart—though of course I knew, and was sorry I had come, and wondered if I could not get away before I had to hear and think too much about it.

"Putting up beet greens," she answered, turning weary and flushed from her arduous task. "Have you put up yours yet? There's nothing one relishes quite so much in mid-winter, we think. If you haven't enough to spare in your garden, we can let you have some of ours."

"Oh, thank you, no!" I replied hastily, backing into the doorway. "To tell the truth, I had not expected to put up any vegetables. They are such a lot of work, and one can buy them all at the store."

"Y-e-e-s," answered Mrs. Wood, trying politely to meet me on my quite untenable ground; "but they aren't nearly so good, do you think? And they're expensive nowadays. I like canning," she added, coming to the real point with a flash of enthusiasm which I recognized but nevertheless found incredible.

"Well, I don't!" I said flatly, and turned and fled, leaving my egg basket unfilled.

"What's the matter?" asked Christopher at the

supper table that night. "Won't the bread rise? Or has the cream turned sour?"

"No; yes," I answered forlornly, rousing myself from the revery into which I had fallen. "The bread and cream are all right, but—well, I don't know that I want to tell you. I'm a little afraid to put it into words. What is your experience? Have you found that it's safer to recognize perils or to ignore them?"

"On the whole, to recognize them," he replied after due consideration. "Sometimes perils can't stand statement any more than ghosts can stand the dawn."

"But not all perils are ghosts, worse luck!" I lamented.

"Aren't they? I don't know. To tell the truth, I hadn't thought about it before. I'm not so sure that they aren't. At any rate, the point is interesting, and I should think it might always be worth while to give them the benefit of the doubt."

"Well," I continued, "I'll hint at the trouble. All our neighbors are madly preserving everything they can lay their hands on. Fruit, vegetables, eggs, meat. I daresay, they're putting up hollyhocks and nasturtiums too, but so far I haven't happened to drop in on that particular process."

Christopher was silent a minute. His eyes smiled and sparkled as they dwelt on me.

"And you a pacifist!" he finally commented.

The remark was so unexpected that I had to be silent in my turn for more than a minute. What could he mean? I groped.

"You've courage enough for some things," he assisted me.

"Ah!" I understood and I smiled back at him. "That was an amazingly skillful jump, Christopher. You mean that, having resisted public opinion for several years in an important matter, I ought to be able to resist it now in a trivial affair. But maybe that's just one of the reasons for my weakness. I've used up all my resistance. I never enjoyed it one bit, you know. I hated being out of the current, aloof from the popular heart."

"I know."

The amusement in Christopher's eyes turned to a look of pure sympathy. He understood.

"Well," he continued after another pause, "that being so, why don't you allow yourself the luxury of yielding to the mob spirit now, letting yourself be carried away?"

"And spend all the rest of the summer toiling and moiling!" I protested on a note of sheer despair. "Christopher, have you any idea what hard

work it is? I don't want to, oh! I don't want to. The prospect is overwhelming."

"Then don't do it."

With admirable common sense and decision, Christopher settled the matter.

It was he, however, who unsettled it, without in the least meaning to do so, that very afternoon. As soon as the shadows began to lengthen, he left the studio, took his hoe, and went out into the garden to cultivate the corn. I saw him from the side piazza where I was restlessly reading a book, and at once my uneasy thoughts started up somewhat in this vein:

"Christopher has worked hard over the garden this year. That's because it's bigger than usual. I wish it weren't. We can't possibly eat all the vegetables. It's a thousand pities that any of his labor should be thrown away. Oh, dear! oh, dear! I wonder if we couldn't give some vegetables to the neighbors. We've carried so many baskets to cottagers that I'm ashamed to burden them further. Yes, Mrs. Mann's garden isn't so very big. I'll take her some beans this minute."

"Heywotchadoon?" said Christopher mildly when I appeared in the garden with a basket.

"Going to take some beans to Mrs. Mann," I answered carelessly.

"Why, she's got beans herself."

Christopher was puzzled. He leaned on his hoe and pushed his hat back from his forehead and looked at me.

"Well, probably not such good beans as yours. And, anyway——"

But I broke off. I had been just on the point of saying, "anyway, she can put them up."

She certainly could, if she had not already done it! When I appeared in her kitchen doorway, a by-this-time familiar atmosphere of hard work and confusion warned me that my old peril was again in the air, and when I entered, I saw rows of bean-filled glass jars reposing on their sides on the kitchen table.

"See my canned beans!" Mrs. Mann proclaimed before she had had time to notice the contents of my basket. "Don't they look nice? I've just finished them. They've taken me pretty much all day. Oh! you've brought me some more. Well, well! isn't that kind in you? Thank you. I—I—well, you see, I've used up most all my jars. But it surely is kind in you. Thank you. I —I—won't you have a chair?"

I made her take those superfluous beans. I would have left them behind me if I had had to dump them into the pig pen. And, for a week or

ten days thereafter, I made constant, feverish efforts to work off our garden's surplus on our embarrassed neighbors and surfeited village friends. The spontaneity of the welcome with which I was wont to be received at kitchen doorways fell off noticeably.

Meantime, my attempted salvation was everywhere my destruction. Not a kitchen doorway but exuded steam from merrily bubbling boilers; not a kitchen table but proudly bore its burden of glass jars. Mine was the only kitchen in town which was not pervaded with the canning stir. How idle and empty it looked when I returned to it! Too loyal to reproach me openly, it yet began to make me aware of a suppressed unhappiness of thwarted ambition.

The whole experience was as fine an example of the power of the mob spirit as I have ever encountered. It made me understand history and human nature as never before.

My capitulation was sudden and yet not unpremeditated. My subconscious self timed it for a certain day when Christopher was to be absent with a fellow painter. There were all sorts of reasons for this—so many that I will leave them to the imagination of the sympathetic reader. I could not bear to be applauded or laughed at or

helped or neglected or, in short, noticed in any way. A crisis was upon me. I must deal with it single-handed.

It is not often that I am glad to see Christopher's back disappearing in the distance. In fact, I think I had never, until that morning, experienced the peculiar sensation of relief. I did not like it and turned away from it to the task that confronted me. Grimly I rolled my sleeves to the shoulder and set my teeth.

Corn. Yes, it was even with that most exacting and difficult vegetable that I had elected to begin. When one makes an unwilling capitulation, there is a certain defiant satisfaction in making it as completely as possible. More or less evasively, I had already collected the essential implements. From the hardware shop I had acquired a tall can with a rack in the bottom, and I had allowed a neighbor to lend me a card of directions of the cold pack method. Casually, I had mentioned in my last grocery order that "I might as well have a dozen preserving jars." Everything was in readiness. The kitchen, awaking to the reality of the opportunity, tingled with expectation.

But, for once, my response was not wholehearted, and that, I suppose, was the great reason why I found the ensuing day so desperately trying.

If I had wanted to put up that corn! But I did not want to.

As I look back on the morning, however, I realize how very much harder it might easily have been, and I am grateful to some domestic good angel who flew to my rescue and prevented me from making quite all the mistakes I had in mind. For instance, my first impulse was to begin at what seemed the obvious beginning, namely, the corn itself; and I was already half out the kitchen doorway, with a basket in my hand, when something warned me that I was going to need a great deal of hot water, and I had better set the preserving can and all the kettles to heat. Yet again, when I had once more started for the garden, I paused and looked doubtfully at my basket. Had I not heard someone say that it took several ears of corn to fill a quart jar? Perhaps I had better provide myself with a larger receptacle.

If it had not been for these two precautions, I should have lost many precious minutes of time. As it was, the floods of hot water which I stood in need of transcended all my calculations, and the largest basket I could find proved absurdly inadequate. Many and many a trip I made between the sink and the stove and between the garden and the refuse heap where I piled discarded corn husks

into a small mountain. And still I never had hot water or corn enough.

It is not my intention here to enumerate all the details of the corn canning process. Probably most of my readers are entirely familiar with them, and anyway this is not a kitchen manual. But of course it was precisely the details, crowding one on another, that hounded and harassed me until I felt like a juggler trying to keep a dozen balls in the air. The tea-kettlesful of water sufficed to scald the corn, but there was not enough left over to flood the jars. The jars themselves I remembered to sink in the warm water and let them come gradually to a boil; but the covers and rubbers I wholly forgot until I had instant need of them, and there they were in a state of nature, untempered and unsterilized. Instant need: that was the trouble. I hate to hurry, and this morning I did nothing but hurry faster and faster. "Oh! it isn't worth while, it isn't worth while!" I moaned to myself as I sped across the kitchen floor, as I struggled with monstrous seas of hot water, as I scraped and packed and deluged.

The dinner hour came and passed, and I had neither time nor stove space to prepare a meal. I might have eaten some scalded corn, to be sure; but just then I loathed corn and, anyway, I could

not spare a kernel from those insatiable jars. As it was, I had twice to leave a jar unfilled and dash out to the garden after a fresh basketful, and hull and scald and scrape all over again. If Christopher had been there, he would have said, "Oh, wurra-wurra!" But, no, I am mistaken; in the light of later events, I am inclined to think that Christopher would have said something much stronger. Three o'clock struck before I had the last jar filled and submerged in boiling water.

Done! I had done it. The kitchen chairs were all spattered with drops of water and kernels of corn and laden with wet dish towels, but I dropped down in the nearest of them and let my hands fall in my lap. In Christopher's sympathetic presence, I should doubtless have wept; but, being alone, I gave myself over to a survey of my once orderly kitchen.

In spite of the fact that I had never seemed to have water and corn enough, there was now water and corn everywhere—on the floor, on the table, on all the chairs, on the walls and the windowsills. There was every dish towel we had in the house. There were kettles and spoons and knives and forks and plates. There were piles of corn husks and strings of corn silk. There were beetles and crickets which had been carried in under the leaves

and which were now forlornly exploring the linoleum. Altogether, a more completely demoralized kitchen could hardly be imagined. And, with a perverse doubling of circumstance on itself, not all the water at large in the room was sufficient to make me a cup of tea. I abandoned the place, turned my back on it, and, going upstairs to my room, fell in a heap on the bed.

When Christopher came back, he laughed. Oh! he laughed. I lay and listened, and vacillated between responsive amusement and irritation and a renewed desire to weep.

"Gee whiz! it got you, didn't it?" he said, hunting me up at last and perching on the edge of the bed, his eyes shining with appreciation. "And no halfway measures. The kitchen looks as if someone had been bombing a corn field in it."

"Doesn't it?" I groaned. "And the thing's not over yet, either. In half an hour the corn will be done and the jars will have to come out of the water and have their covers snapped. I don't know how in the world I'm going to get them out. You see, they're completely immersed."

"Well, leave that to me," said Christopher, promptly taking over the burden as is his comforting wont. "I'll manage it somehow. I'll get supper too. You must be about played out."

"Played!" I protested. "I've never done anything much less like play in my life."

Christopher is deft and resourceful, but the removal of those jars of corn from their seething cauldron gave him serious pause. In order to make quite sure of the absolute immersion on which the directions insisted, I had sunk them in steaming depths upon depths. When we lifted the cover and peered in, we could not see them at all.

"Suppose we bale out a little first," Christopher suggested presently. "Then we can locate them."

And he went to work with a dipper and pail.

"It says: keep them well covered," I remarked uneasily from his elbow; "and snap them instantly on taking them out. They ought to come one at a time, I suppose. . . . Oh, Christopher, look out! You'll scald yourself."

I fell back hastily to give him room, for he had made a pounce with one of my long-suffering dish towels, and, seizing a jar by the neck, had extracted it.

"Here goes, then!" he cried, bearing his prize across the room, depositing it on the kitchen table and snapping down the wire that held its cover in place. "No, I'm not burned, not a bit. I'll go back and get another. But first I want to look at this one. I say, aren't you proud? I am for you.

It looks absolutely professional. Golly! what a success!"

Yes, I was proud. The unexpected sensation came welling up from within me in a manner which I found both refreshing and disheartening. Proud: after all my rebellion and protest, my hard, hard work, my unutterable fatigue! But how could I resist the appeal of that sleek dripping jar with its pale yellow kernels so close-packed within, giving every evidence of unqualified success? I did not want to rejoice in it, but I could not help myself. Lifting it in the dish towel, I turned it around and around, lost in impotent admiration. My handiwork! A success!

Christopher's voice recalled me. He had returned to the stove with the intention of removing another jar, but stood arrested by some uncertainty.

"I say, come here," he said (and I came with a rush). "You see, the removal of that jar lowered the level of the water, so that all the other jars have now got their heads out. Do you suppose it makes any difference?"

I was appalled. The directions had made a great point of insisting that the jars be completely immersed until the instant before they were

snapped. And here they were all rearing their heads into the baleful air.

"Oh, hurry, hurry!" I cried. "Get them out quick. I'll help."

The confusion of the morning was nothing to the distraction of the next two or three minutes during which Christopher and I ran back and forth across the kitchen floor. We worked so fast that we got in each other's way, and one jar fell off the table and broke. More water and corn were contributed to the kitchen floor. Christopher swore softly and continually. As for me, I was speechless with haste and dismay.

"Oh! do you suppose they're all right?" I asked, catching my breath at last when the crisis was over and all the jars stood sealed on the kitchen table.

"Isn't there any way we can test them?" inquired Christopher.

"Well," I answered, with an ominous reluctance, falling back on my oft-repeated formula, "the directions say they should be inverted and examined for leaks."

"Bubbles indicate leaks, I suppose," supplemented Christopher.

He was always prompter and braver than I. While I cravenly hesitated, he suited his action to my word and inverted one of the jars.

Alas! I had known it would be so, and therefore I had hesitated. As we bent and peered anxiously, a perfect geyser of bubbles rushed up along the inside of the jar.

Of course we know now, and all my intelligent readers know, that they were steam bubbles and that they always play about the interior of newly sealed jars; but at the time we were too inexperienced and too flurried to realize the innocence of the phenomenon. Under the peculiar circumstances it looked utterly damnable to us, and we gazed at each other aghast.

"Well," said Christopher doggedly in a minute—he set his lips and his jaw in a way that I understood and respected—"what next? What else do your old directions say? If there are leaks——"

" 'Remove the tops and repeat the process,' " I quoted wretchedly.

Is there anything in the world quite like the *sang froid* of recipes? Repeat the process! As if it were a mere matter of minutes and casual concern. I saw Christopher glance at the clock, evidently computing the number of hours the process had already cost me, and then cast his eye about the ravaged kitchen. But he did not hesitate. With his jaw set firmer than ever and a dangerous gleam

in his eye, he fell upon the remaining jars (thank heaven, one was safe and one was broken!), wrenched their covers from them, set more water to boil (oh, more water!), and presently had "the process" in full swing again. With this dazzling improvement upon my method, that now every submerged jar was secured by a loop of twine which hung over the side of the can.

Common sense came to our rescue in time to prevent us from repeating the entire process. The point was, as Christopher submitted—revived and cheered by the frugal meal which we managed to prepare—the point was simply to make sure that the air was expelled. So when the last drop of tea and the last cigarette puff had done their beneficent work, we lifted the jars, one by one, by their strings and snapped their covers tight.

"No," said Christopher peremptorily, when he saw me about to invert a jar and examine it.

I thought he was merely so perfectly sure of success this time that he did not want to indulge in the waste of a test; but he confessed to me later—much later—that the innocent nature of the steam bubbles had been so convincingly borne in upon him while he was eating his supper that he could not bear to face their recurrence and prove to him-

self that our whole repetition of process had been unnecessary.

With one accord, we turned our backs on the kitchen, leaving it just as it was, and went out into the cool summer dusk.

"You're entirely right," said Christopher there, after a long, restful silence. "The thing's not worth while. We won't do it again. Next year we'll have a small hand-to-mouth garden and buy our winter vegetables canned."

X

IT is illustrative of the hold my kitchen had taken on me that I have devoted all these pages and chapters exclusively to it. When, as a matter of fact, its interest was only one among the many that filled the days and weeks of our first genuine country life.

Too many. Yes, that was the unexpected trouble. And Christopher had his effrontery with him when he lectured me on my slavery to the kitchen! How about his to the orchard, the garden, the lawn, the Ford, the woodshed, the fences, the neighbors' cows and hens? He had come into the country to paint, and at first, except in fits and starts, he was not doing it.

From the early days of our return there was something about him that caused me a vague apprehension. I did not know what it was: a new expression, a surprising tendency to get up early in the morning and mend fences, a knowing way of investigating the bark of apple trees. I did not think

much about it, until a neighbor came in to see us one evening and brought it out into the open.

We were sitting in the orchard, and Christopher was lost in a study of the pattern the gnarled boughs made against the sunset sky. I knew from his expression—familiar enough this time—that the creative mood was hovering.

"Nice old picturesque place!" he remarked as we welcomed our neighbor and sat down again. "I think maybe tomorrow I'll have a try at it with my brushes."

"Picturesque—well, yes," the neighbor assented politely, but with a note of demur. "It's been badly neglected, however, and that's rather a shame, don't you think? When I saw you out here this evening I thought perhaps you were looking it over with a view to saving it."

There was a silence. I saw the new look creep back into Christopher's face, and I think he must have felt it because he gave me a curious glance—dismayed and defiant and apologetic. For a full minute the balance hung. Then he squared his shoulders and thrust his hands in his pockets.

"Tell me about it," he said challengingly to the neighbor.

In another five minutes I was left sitting alone in the grass while the neighbor and Christopher

went the rounds of the orchard. Fragments of sentences came back to me, concerning dry rot, scales and borers, methods of pruning and spraying, the crying need for fertilization. I was amazed at my husband's facility with the unknown jargon. When he returned his face was aglow, swept clear of its recent pensiveness, and he cried eagerly:

"I've learned such a lot! Why, I had no idea. We've come just in time to save the orchard. I'm going to send for some books and tools tomorrow, and——"

He broke off suddenly, and I did not have to ask what was the matter.

Yet the fatal process was so gradual that, for some time, we were both able to keep our misgivings in our subconsciousness, where they caused us only occasional, transient difficulties in meeting each other's eyes when a new apple catalogue appeared in our mail box. We even congratulated ourselves on the privilege of devoting our leisure time to such a wholesome pursuit as the reclaiming of an old orchard. I emulated my husband's zeal by applying myself to the flower beds, weeding and transplanting and rearranging. Our cheeks and hands grew brown, the city folds disappeared from our clothes, and our appetites were appalling.

"Christopher," I said one evening when we had been home a month or six weeks, "did I see you starting out with your sketch box this afternoon?"

Christopher stirred uneasily.

"Yes, you did," he replied in a troubled voice. "The sky was stunning, and I was just in the mood. But I got no farther than the studio door, for the man came with the asparagus roots and I had to stop and attend to him. Then he said that the plants ought to go in the ground at once. So I spent the rest of the day in the garden."

"Asparagus?" I echoed blankly.

"Why, yes," answered Christopher with another of his curious mingled glances. "Of course if you live in the country, it's a foregone conclusion that you must have a garden; and I thought I might as well order the asparagus along with the new apple trees."

"New apple trees?" I echoed again. "I didn't know—but, well, yes, of course, the orchard needs them. Dear me! Never mind. All right. Christopher, tell me, would you plant tulips or crocuses in that bed? And do you think you could find time to prune the lilac bush?"

Several weeks elapsed before we again mentioned the subject of painting, but by that time our

misgivings had left our subconsciousness and were causing us real concern.

"I think the trouble is," said Christopher with characteristic hopefulness, "that we aren't yet fitted into our new environment. Isn't it perhaps natural that we should have to devote all our time to our surroundings while we are growing accustomed to them?"

"Perhaps," I assented doubtfully; "but I am beginning to suspect that this place has a vigorous will of its own and that a great deal depends on the way we start in with it."

"Well," sighed Christopher, stretching himself out in the grass, then instantly getting up to mark a bough that needed pruning, "I must say I like it. Perhaps that's the trouble. There's something primitive in me that responds to all this outdoor work. It's fine, it's exhilarating."

He laid his hand in a comradely fashion on the rough gray trunk near him.

But of course it is axiomatic that there is no such jealous mistress as Art, and it was not long before conflict caused an occasional line to appear between Christopher's eyes. When that line was there he had less than usual to say about the joys of country life.

It was not only the place that made such surpris-

ing demands upon us—our own innocent-looking five or six acres; the whole community presently began putting in social claims that bewildered us. "But I have no voice to speak of!" Christopher protested when he was asked to sing in the church choir; and, "Why, but I'm a landscape painter!" when it was suggested that he help organize a Society of Natural Science. As for me, I was put to it to explain without giving offence that I had no qualifications for teaching a Sunday School class or reading a paper in the Woman's Missionary Meeting. The perplexity with which our excuses were received was equal to that with which they were proffered; and, after pondering and discussing the situation for awhile, we came to the conclusion that specialization, taken for granted in the city, is almost unknown in the country.

"You remember the story of the man who, being asked whether he could play the violin, replied that he didn't know, he had never tried. Well," said Christopher, "I see now that he came from a country village and that his answer wasn't absurd but entirely reasonable. I certainly didn't know, two months ago, that I could do a plumber's job or write an acceptable paper on Darwinism, but . . ." He made a comprehensive and complacent gesture.

"See *me* jump!" I murmured, getting back at him the comment with which he has always been wont to greet my own occasional bursts of self-gratulation.

"Well," he repeated, laughing but holding his ground, "it *is* a satisfaction to find that one can do more than two or three things; one feels just so much more of a man for every new accomplishment. I see now that life in the city tends to be narrow and partial and superficial, whereas life in the country is as broad and deep as humanity itself. Heaven knows I'm not pious," he went on reflectively, "and never supposed I could tolerate being considered so; but I really think I'll be tickled to death if they make me a deacon of the church.

"Gee! what a joke!" he concluded soberly.

It was a joke. As the weeks went by and it became more and more generally understood that we were no longer "city people" but had come to cast in our lot with the country folk for good and all, we found ourselves filling rôles of which we had never dreamed before. Christopher was no longer a simple painter but was also a deacon, a darky minstrel (at a local "show"), a scientist, a plumber, a carpenter, a farmer, a mechanic. And I was an equal number of unprecedented things.

"I shan't ever need any reincarnations," Chris-

topher laughed one day. "I'm living eight or nine lives at once, here and now."

But the problem presented by the difficulty of fitting all these new lives into the same old familiar twenty-four hours was not a joke, and we finally found that we should have to tackle it seriously. Otherwise, we might as well throw away our paint tubes and empty our ink bottle.

First, I remember, we tried philosophy; and, by dint of much reading of Marcus Aurelius, sought to establish an impregnable inner control, so that, no matter how much our bodies might be interrupted, our minds should continue serenely on their way.

While this method prevailed, Christopher would start for his studio as early as possible in the morning and I would likewise start for my desk, both of us submitting patiently to the demands of our environment by the way. Arrived and established, we would work for some fifteen or twenty minutes, when I would glance from my window and hastily call across to the studio: "Christopher! Christopher! There's that black horse in the garden again. He's eating the peas." Then Christopher would sally forth and put an end to this neighborly call. My turn would come next. Absorbed in a paper on the nature of the Catholic

Mass, I would hear a loud ringing of bells and realize that my only chance to buy fish for dinner was at the gate. So then, hugging the thread of my thought, I would emerge from the house. "Reality is ineffable," I would go chanting to myself. "It is more nearly approached by symbols than—no, not cod, we had cod last week—how much is your halibut?"

This business safely over, again a brief pause would favor us, broken by the arrival of a tramp or peddler, neither applicant to be neglected according to the kindly laws of country etiquette. The tramp I would hand over to Christopher, the peddler I would interview myself, conscientiously buying shoe-strings which I did not need. By eleven o'clock the horse would be back in the garden, a neighbor's child would have come with a "soap order" list, two summer boarders would have walked out from the village and would be hanging over the fence, distractingly praising the flowers, the telephone would have rung six times, a neighbor's cat would have caught one of our robins (we have no cat of our own on purpose to safeguard the birds), a neighbor's kitten would have fallen into our rain-barrel, another neighbor's child would have come to borrow the ice-cream freezer and her father the wheelbarrow, and

Christopher would have remembered that he had forgotten to water his transplanted seedlings. Oh, the unraveled mysteries of the Catholic Mass! And, oh, the rainbow hues of Christopher's face on which his frequently and hastily abandoned brush had revenged itself by depositing most of its paint!

"Christopher," I said forlornly one evening, as we sat in the orchard in a mercifully deepening dusk which prevented the counting of superfluous suckers on the apple trees, "I'm afraid we shall have to give up and go back to the city."

Christopher gave a great start of dismay.

"With those Northern Spies just beginning to bear again! With the asparagus bed nicely started! With my picture of West Mountain unfinished! What are you thinking about?"

"The unfinished picture of course," I replied. "You can't work on it tomorrow because you've got to meet the Convention delegates and set up the stereopticon. And the next day a man's coming to consult you on some County Improvement business. And the day after that, the County Agent's going to inspect the orchard. And—oh, Christopher! doesn't a city apartment sound heavenly quiet to you?"

"No," replied Christopher resolutely, sitting up

in the grass and turning his back on a tent worms' nest which the rising moon had just revealed to him. "It sounds hideous, and I refuse to think about it. I tell you what we'll do. We'll chuck Marcus Aurelius, and I'll bind myself by a solemn vow to paint, say, from nine to one every morning. Then I'll have to do it or break my word. That will give me a good solid deaconly reason to oppose to——"

"Everything!" I broke in joyfully. "To the visits of the horse, to the arrival of the potato bug, to the burning down of the house, to the falling of the heavens. Christopher, it's a good idea. I wonder we never tried it before."

"Well," sighed Christopher, "it's a schedule, and I've always declared I wouldn't live by a schedule. But of course that was in the simple, free life of the city. Here in the distracting country, I seem driven to it."

This is our present method: the schedule. We are so rigid about it that we have even gone so far as to send a matutinal church committee empty away from our unresponsive gate. But I do not yet feel safe. There is always too much hovering threat in the air: from the weedy garden, the imminent potato bug and rose beetle, the clanging

meat wagon, and the thousand and one interests of the day.

One thing is perfectly certain: the leisure of a country life has been over-estimated.

XI

WHILE I am on the subject of interruptions I wonder if I dare tackle a delicate, difficult theme which I am sure many country residents will thank me for opening up. It is that of the unannounced arrival of motor tourists.

But immediately my heart fails me, for it is one of the joys of living in a beautiful valley that, sooner or later, one may expect all one's friends to stop at one's gate. And not for anything would I discourage them.

If they would only let one know! That is the unique burden, the sum and substance of my complaint. Surely there are post offices and telegraph stations everywhere, surely the long distance telephone is ubiquitous.

I do not know what there is about the process of motoring that makes people so irresponsible. Is it just the uncertainty of the road, the chance of tire or engine trouble? Or is the motor tourist in a thoroughly care-free holiday mood and does

he take it for granted that everyone else is the same?

The people who come to see us certainly never dream that we are ever busy, that we have possible engagements, that there is any danger of failing to find us on our front doorstep waiting for them. And so we miss many calls which we might just as well as not have been at home to receive, and many others find us in a state where we cannot do justice to them.

I remember one ill-fated day when, having a hard and fast engagement with Christopher in the afternoon, I nevertheless decided to put up tomatoes in the morning. That was a mistake to begin with, and I deserved the frenzy of haste and fatigue which by twelve o'clock had reduced me to a limp but agitated rag reeking with tomato juice. How was I going to get any dinner before the afternoon engagement fell due? Well, fortunately, Christopher was a long-suffering angel. I would make some tomato soup and let it go at that. But, oh, how tired I was! Could I possibly take another step across that kitchen floor?

While I was in the act of filling my last four or five jars with tomatoes, I heard a motor horn blowing merrily outside the gate, and my heart fell into the very bottom of my shoes—a thing that no

decent heart likes to do when its friends are at the door. I stayed where I was. Let Christopher go. Probably they were his friends, not mine.

A minute later, Christopher's voice was heard calling me with a note of exaggerated, even desperate enthusiasm: "Dear! dear! can you come? The Arnolds are here."

"But I can't! Look at me! How can I?" I wailed when, strangely failing to make me hear, he entered the kitchen. "I'm barely distinguishable from a tomato."

His glance was not reassuring.

"You might take off your apron and wipe your face," he suggested. "Anyway, really you must come. They've brought their lunch, and they want us to take ours and picnic with them in the orchard. They haven't long to stay."

The whole episode was so unfortunate that, though I began its narration with some zest, I find that I have not the heart to pursue it further. There were six people, immaculate, unjaded, brimming with friendliness, ready to give us an hour of delightful intercourse, and there was I, unspeakable and speechless, a disgraceful sight to behold and so tired that I could not even think. Moreover, there were my tomatoes still claiming attention, and there was no picnic lunch ready, and there was the after-

noon's engagement looming. "Oh, why didn't, why didn't you let us know?" I lamented. "Then I wouldn't have got into all this mess, then I should have had things ready for you, then——" What I wanted to add was, "then I should have been glad to see you," but I stopped just in time.

It was the point though, the important reason why motor tourists should let people know when they mean to drop in on them. It is a real offense to deprive a hostess of her natural joy at receiving guests.

I remember another occasion when some people did telephone from a neighboring village just as we were about to get into the Ford to keep an engagement of several days' standing. "Oh, hello!" sang Christopher. "Is that you? Well, that's great, that's bully! We—yes—that is, we—I don't suppose you could come later in the afternoon, could you? No? Well, of course then, all right. We shall be mighty glad to see you."

"It's Uncle John and Aunt Annie," he said, hanging up the receiver and turning to me. "They'll be here in fifteen minutes. I haven't seen them in six years. Of course I had to give them the preference."

Followed a frantic ten minutes at the telephone, trying to get the friends with whom we had our

afternoon engagement, calling everything off, rearranging all our plans. Followed, in another five minutes, a call from our relatives so brief that it kept and left us gasping.

"No, we really ought not to get out. You see, we want to make Brattleboro this afternoon. We simply felt that we couldn't pass so near without a glimpse of you. Well, then, just a minute. What a nice old house and what a lovely garden! No, we couldn't think of staying all night. We're going on to the White Mountains tomorrow. And really we ought to be on our way. Goodbye. So glad to have had this glimpse of you!"

"But why do you suppose they came at all?" I said feebly to Christopher when, after another frantic and futile session with the telephone, trying to recapture our engagement, we found ourselves left with the afternoon on our hands.

"Search me!" answered Christopher. "They barely looked at us. They were really thinking about nothing but Brattleboro. That's mostly what motor tourists do think about—their next destination and how to get there as soon as possible. The people and things they see by the way are just side issues."

"Well, I think they might have let us know what they intended to do," I voiced my familiar plaint.

Take it all in all, motor tourists are the most disconcerting, disorganizing element we have in our country life, more incalculable than the freakish Vermont weather, more tantalizing than the garden melons and sweet peas.

It is too bad. For they might be one of our greatest blessings.

XII

SPEAKING of the telephone:

There is one room in our old house which, from our first occupation, has steadily refused to conform to any of the normal, conventional uses of a room. Though it lies between the kitchen and dining-room and has an exposure which catches the morning sun, it has not fallen in with our notion of making a breakfast room of it. Neither, in those helpless pre-war days when we thought "we must have a maid," did it lend itself gracefully to the rôle of maid's sitting-room. There were too many doors in it for the peace of mind of "followers." Probably all people who have had experience with old houses know how wilful they can be. A refractory room will never yield to dictation, but must be let alone on the chance that, sooner or later, some suitable rôle will present itself.

The introduction of the telephone was the cue for which our anomalous little apartment waited, reserving itself, not obstinately as we had supposed,

but with a fine, single-minded, resolute wisdom which might teach a lesson to mutable, grouping humanity. It knew its own when it saw it, and at once its assertion of will became as positive as it had lately been negative. We had rather expected to put the telephone in a corner of the hall where it could be heard in all parts of the house. Our "party line" has many subscribers, and the business of recognizing our own particular summons is not simple. But, no! though the hall was willing enough, even eager, it had no show whatever against the suddenly concentrated volition of the room in the rear of the house; and before we knew quite what was happening the telephone was installed close by the side door that opens out on the little south porch. It was not very convenient for us, but it was immensely convenient for our neighbors, and that was the happy point.

Only a few of our neighbors have telephones of their own. Considering the situation beforehand, from the cold, stupid point of view of the city apartment dweller, we should probably have preferred that they should all be equipped with the means of transacting their business in their own homes. But that prejudgment would only have proved how thoroughly stupid we were. In the first place, our particular line meanders across half

a township and is so crowded and voluble that patience, patience (and sometimes a quick dash of impatience) is needed if one is to get a word in edgewise. I frequently spend half an hour waiting for a chance to order a yeast cake from the village store. One neighbor in particular flies to the ear of her bosom friend twenty times a day to say that she has scorched her potatoes (no wonder!) or that her new shirt-waist doesn't fit or that she thinks it's going to rain. I acknowledge the impropriety of overhearing these confidences, but I have to—we all have to—in order to seize the wire when at last it is momentarily free. It is amusing to hear us clicking our receivers and sighing audibly all up and down the line. This difficulty being what it is, one can understand that new subscribers are not desired in our part of the valley.

The reason is low and selfish, however, and, to do us justice, it is not the reason which ranks first with Christopher and me when we assure our neighbors we'd rather have them use our telephone than install their own. Our great argument may be selfish too (I suppose most arguments are), but at least it is not self-centered; it consists in the grateful knowledge that through their use of our telephone our neighbors enlarge and deepen our

life, permitting us to share experience which otherwise we should never have had. Country life does this anyway. In the city, existence is specialized and groups of friends are apt to be of one temper and tradition; but in the country everything that happens, happens more or less to everyone and all temperaments associate. We had begun to realize this before we installed our telephone, and as soon as the latter step was taken we understood that the telephone room was henceforth the type and symbol of what we liked best about our new life. It belonged not so much to us as to the neighborhood, and for that reason it had not been willing to subserve the uses of our private household. For that reason also it had seven doors (mystic number, by the way!) through which our neighbors might enter and through which we of the household might scatter when we found ourselves *de trop*.

Vermonters are traditionally proud and independent; they do not like to be extensively "beholden." Therefore it follows that our neighbors use our telephone mostly for inexorable reasons, and when we hear the side gate swing open and quick footsteps come up the walk, our first thought is: "Something has happened." Then, with a strangely alert balance of mind, one of us hastens to answer the knock at the door, ready to respond

to any one of a number of tones in which the familiar question may be put: "Please, may I use the telephone?" Generally, I am sorry to say, it is into the shadow instead of the light that the balance swings; for the joyful crises of life need no remedies and as a rule bring their own implements with them. The doctor, the telegraph operator and, alas! the undertaker are the people most often summoned by our neighbors over our telephone. Sometimes the initial appeal inaugurates a long, heart-rending series of similar applications, so that for days we are harrowed by suspense and burdened by responsibility. One of us must be always within earshot of the telephone bell and ready to hasten up the road with whatever message may arrive. How I ran, how I flew, how I waved my hand and shouted when "Your son better" came! But, alas! how soberly Christopher and I looked into each other's faces the next morning and how cravenly glad we were that our neighbor had started for what she supposed to be her boy's convalescent bedside, and we should not have to break the fatal news to her.

Most of the people who use our telephone naturally prefer to carry on their own conversations, but a few of them have never learned to feel at ease in the manipulation of mouthpiece and re-

ceiver, and they sometimes put us on our mettle by asking us to deliver all sorts and kinds of messages. "Oh, say! I don't know how to do it. It drives all the words right out of my head and makes me feel awful queer. You do it for me. You just tell the doctor I ain't quite satisfied, and I'm going to call someone else. Not exactly in those words, you know, but so's not to hurt his feelings." Or: "Say, I've got a chance to trade horses with a man across the valley, and I wish you'd speak to him for me. Tell him my horse is as sound as a nut. I don't know just how to put it and, anyway, he'd believe you sooner than me." On these occasions Christopher and I vie with each other in discovering errands to take us immediately and imperatively to remote parts of the house, but whichever one of us succeeds in "passing the buck" comes creeping back presently to admire the other's conversational antics. Christopher guilelessly conducting a horse trade is a treat for gods and men.

Not often, however, are our services as auxiliary mouthpieces desired, and not always is it expedient even that we share experience. Now and then it happens that a youthful neighbor, male or female, hesitatingly knocks at the door and asks so shyly, with such heightened color and evasive eyes, to use the telephone that I know my duty at once and

make haste to withdraw behind some one of the seven doors, closing it conspicuously behind me. I hate to do this. My appetite for romance is as keen as anyone's, and it doesn't seem fair that most of the vicarious life which the telephone brings me should be in the minor key. Christopher says that I have my full share of feminine curiosity too. But I am helpless to take advantage of my opportunities for eaves-dropping; the telephone room will not let me, it keeps me firmly in my place. Generally that place is the kitchen, and I am sometimes put to it to know what to do about an impending meal. Shall I let it dry up in the oven while Christopher waits hungrily in his corresponding imprisonment behind the dining-room door? Or shall I defiantly brave the telephone room's displeasure and scurry across it with my dinner dishes? Now and then I have risked the latter offence—"after all, am I or am I not the mistress of this house?"—but I have always been sorry. The floor of the telephone room has burned my feet. "Mistress of the rest of the house perhaps," it has sternly informed me, "but not of me. I should think you would know that by this time. I belong to the person who is using the telephone." Abashed, I have taken refuge with Christopher and the rest of the dinner has dried or burned.

The result of all this is that I am coming to look on the telephone room with a kind of awe. We cannot be said to hold it in trust for the neighborhood, since we do not hold it, it concedes nothing to our title-deed. But we are permitted to house it and enable it to fulfil its destiny. It is an august little place, compact of tragedy and comedy and all the deep significance of human life. Its walls are written with an invisible script wherein drama lurks.

XIII

I HAVE implied, if I have not actually stated, that vegetarianism, as a natural corollary to our new rule of simplicity, was being more and more consistently practiced by us. But perhaps consistently is not the word, for there was nothing rigid about our conformity. When meat came our way we ate it and liked it. It came seldom, however, and it was during our long successions of meatless days that we realized how little we missed the viand.

"I've always wondered if I didn't want to be a vegetarian anyway," I confessed to Christopher one day over a particularly delicious and satisfying egg and cheese soufflé which we were eating for dinner.

Christopher grinned as a tribute to my conservatism.

"And that's as far as it ever went?"

"As far as it ever went. Oh! I'm ashamed when I realize how many nebulous ideas I've kept in the back of my mind all these years, too lazy or

timid to let them take shape and come forward where I could look at them. The whole idea of simplicity has just been waiting its chance; and vegetarianism—yes, the innocence and beauty of it have always appealed to me."

"Well," answered Christopher, "I guess we're a lazy and timid lot in the world anyway. We accept standards as we find them and we put off challenge and change as long as possible. Moreover, perhaps, we don't quite trust ourselves to really want to be different from other people. That's only decent and modest in us. Who are we to prefer a manner of life which other people dislike? We're suspicious of fads too. Our self-respect restrains us from committing ourselves to that which after all we may not want to go on with. So we needn't be altogether ashamed of ourselves."

"Only humbly grateful," I added, "that circumstance has enabled us to try out some of our ideas as matters of course and so has woven them for us into the warp and woof of everyday life. Vegetarianism can't be a fad when you practice it without realizing that you are doing so."

Christopher nodded.

"We've been lucky," he acquiesced. "And now that we do realize, now that we're fully awake and aware, we must see to it that we stay so."

"Christopher," I replied feelingly—and by no means for the first time in my life—"you're an amazingly satisfactory companion."

And yet, after all this, in spite of a truth which every intelligent reader will understand to be genuine, Christopher himself betrayed me into a situation which teemed with apparent falsehood: Christopher, "mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread." The episode was one of those in which the irony of life delights.

It happened this way—at least, it began, for the story has two parts:

Issuing from an afternoon tea in the village one day, I found myself in company with two summer cottagers, unmarried women of a sedate and thoughtful demeanor, people whom I did not know very well but whom I liked and respected and in whose eyes I wished to appear estimable. Our way lay together for half a mile, and we naturally settled down to conversation. Now, as I have explained in a previous chapter, real conversation for me that summer meant culinary discussion. My kitchen was my head of Charles the First. Therefore, I had not taken ten steps along the country road before I began:

"Somebody told me that you are doing your own

housework this summer. That interests me, for I'm doing mine too. Do you like it? I do, but I find that it takes a great deal of time."

Even as I spoke, I was at a loss to account for the tone in which I made the concluding statement —anxious, almost aggrieved, as if, forsooth, I thought I had some ground for complaint! One's own perversity plays tricks like that on one sometimes. Perhaps it seemed to me that a touch of respectful inferiority on my part might prove ingratiating. Whatever my motive, I was uncandid and richly deserved punishment.

My companion's response was cordial and quite as benevolent as I might have expected.

"Oh, yes! we like it, and it by no means takes all our time. We've learned to manage. But then," breaking off with a glance of condolence, "of course we have the advantage of you in the fact that we're only two women. Everything must be harder with you and take more time."

I was nettled. That was ridiculous in me, since I had clearly invited a measure of sympathy. But it was all a part of my prompt punishment.

"Why?" I inquired coldly, feeling my mood veer to the defensive.

Again my companion glanced at me, and this time there was a shade of perplexity mingled with

the compassion which every happily unmarried woman feels for the happily married.

"Well," she explained modestly, "of course a man makes a great difference in a house. He must have more to eat, he must live on a bigger scale altogether. We live very simply. For instance, we have meat only once a day, and all our meals are informal. We do the housework together and neither of us is fussy. Why, one day it even happened that the meat peddler didn't stop at all, and——"

But I could not stand this. It was too much. Outrage capped outrage when I was first pitied for having Christopher in the house and was then reminded of the ease and beauty of simplicity. Christopher! I! Kindly explain to a Trappist monk that silence is golden; advise Mary Garden to cultivate a musical ear!

"See here!" I broke in. "Excuse me, but you don't know what you're talking about. Meat! fussy! a man! Why, it's precisely Christopher who has taught me not to be fussy, and simplicity is the very thing we both like best of all. I couldn't do my own work without Christopher. He's full of ingenious suggestions and can turn his hand to anything. He doesn't care what he has to eat, only he'd really rather not have meat. 'Meat once a

day!' Why, if we have it once a week we think we're living high. I didn't even know there was a meat peddler in the village now, for he's never learned the way to our house."

There was a silence. I hope the tone in which I had delivered myself of my repudiation had not been offensive, but I had certainly spoken flatly and there seemed nothing more to be said. My two companions glanced at each other, signalling a covert exchange of critical thoughts. I knew that they did not believe me, that they pitied me more than ever; and when our ways diverged, I left them, feeling unhappily that a promising conversation had been most unfortunately spoiled and that I had somehow, obscurely, been defeated on my own ground.

Three or four days later (and this is the second part of the story), Christopher and I were invited to a picnic in the village. We were to bring our own supper with us and contribute it to the common supply of food. I made johnnycake and stuffed eggs and tried a new recipe for gingerbread which turned out very well.

We were rather late in arriving, for Christopher had, unexpectedly to both of us, been away from home all day and had returned only just in time to get a bath and change.

"Did you have any dinner?" I called after him as he dashed upstairs.

"Nope," he called back.

"Well, see here,"—I followed to the bathroom door—"you must be frightfully hungry. Don't you want a glass of milk? If I'd only known you were going like this, I'd have put you up a lunch."

"Never mind," he replied from the midst of his splashings, "there isn't time now, and I'll get supper enough over there. Be ready to start in five minutes."

A dinnerless day leaves a vacuum in a big man like Christopher, and I was as glad for him as he was for himself to find that supper was already being served when we reached the picnic ground. I carried my contribution to the base of supplies, and Christopher dropped down in the first vacant place he saw—as it happened, beside one of the women with whom I had walked away from the tea a few days before.

"Can I help?" I inquired of the mistress of ceremonies.

"Why, yes, if you will," she replied. "You might pass this plate of sandwiches."

Here we find succor for Christopher. I hastened with it to that part of the group where he was seated, carrying on a brisk conversation with

everyone in his neighborhood and now and then ruefully regarding an inadequate dab of cream cheese which had been deposited on his plate. He never cares much for cream cheese anyway, and under the circumstances——! When I stopped before him he looked up and an expression came into his eyes which, I vow, I had never seen there before. ("No, I presume not!" his present companion might have remarked.) It was eager, glowing, ecstatic; it was the gaze of a lost mariner at a familiar light.

"*Meat* sandwiches!" he said, extending not one of his hands but both. "Oh, meat sandwiches! I tell you, that's man's food; that's something like. Me for meat sandwiches!"

Of course there is absolutely nothing to be done about a *contretemps* like that. The intelligent (and I hope properly sympathetic) reader does not need to be told that Christopher's stress had nothing to do with the quality but everything with the quantity of the food he found before his famished eyes, and that he was contrasting it with the dab of cream cheese. A plateful of baked beans would have done just as well. But no amount of such explanation would have had any effect on his companions. They knew what they thought, and it was very definite and damaging.

"The poor man! That wife of his gives him nothing to eat and then pretends that he doesn't like food. Not like meat, indeed! His pleasure over those sandwiches was pitiful. Couldn't we invite him to dinner once in a while and give him a square meal?" The fact that they did not say this, that they said nothing at all and even refrained from laughing at me crushed me completely. It showed how seriously they took the affair. My exposure was so shameful that I must not be confronted with it.

On the way home, between laughter and tears, I told Christopher what he had done, and he laughed loud and long—with no tears.

"It's very strange how easily one betrays one's self," he reflected by and by on a subsiding chuckle. "One does not mean to, does not in the least want to, is desolated to do so in fact. Some imp possesses one."

"Yes," I admitted. "I began it by talking the other day as if I found housework exacting. Did you ever!"

"Well," said Christopher, "then I guess you'll have to forgive me. We'll forgive ourselves. But perhaps it would be just as well not to make pretensions to simplicity in the future."

"Pretensions!" I murmured. "Yes, I see. I did need taking down, didn't I?"

XIV

AS the beautiful summer passed and the still more beautiful autumn followed it, we found ourselves facing an experience which excited us. We had neither of us ever spent a winter in the country, and the prospect of doing so filled us with as lively a sense of adventure as a trip to the other side of the moon.

There were warnings and preparations enough. The October glory was swept from the trees, and the blazing hills became ashen gray, stripped and austere. The grass crouched and shrivelled. The birds disappeared. The sun followed them into the south and confined itself to an ever-diminishing circuit across the sky. Our neighbors busied themselves in banking their houses with leaves, and the village store set up a counter of the strangest garments I had ever seen. Such portentous garments! When they first appeared I stood spell-bound before them. Then I plucked Christopher by the sleeve. "Look!" I said under my breath.

The day was chilly and the village idlers had

been driven in from the front steps to the neighborhood of the stove. Hence my timidity. I was precisely in the position of a country-bred person before a Fifth Avenue show-case and I felt conspicuous and at a disadvantage. But my curiosity was too strong for the defensive indifference which instinct suggested. When the storekeeper bore down upon me I gratified him and my audience by breaking forth into questions which caused them all to lean and listen and smile behind their hands. "What is that for? Do you wear it on your head or your feet? And what in the world is the nature of that?" The storekeeper was very polite—much more graciously so than a Fifth Avenue clerk would have been to a farmer's wife—but he was amused and condescending, as why should he not have been? He showed me great shapeless boots and heavy felt stockings designed to be worn together in layers of thickness and warmth. He showed me cumbersome fleece-lined coats and ear-eclipsing caps and solid mittens and gloves. As he demonstrated I had many a vivid glimpse of snow-heaped woods and many a shivering hint of mid-winter temperature. A few weeks later, Christopher went back and bought a sample of everything on that counter.

I have always maintained that places have souls

and I am sure that the peculiarly sensitive soul of our valley was pleased by our casting in of our lot with her. As soon as she realized that we were indeed going to stay through the winter she rewarded us by turning and smiling on us in a series of the most magical days we had ever known. Summer in December, in Vermont! It was miraculous. I remember particularly one afternoon when I waited for Christopher alone in the woods. He had—to be perfectly frank, he had gone up on the mountainside to appropriate some of the fruits of an orchard which we seemed to appreciate more than its rightful owner. The woods were utterly still. The tall bare trees stood in motionless gray ranks about me, and through and beyond them I could look off to the hills across the valley. The sun had gone down at three o'clock, and the creeping shadow of the western hills wrapped the feet of the opposite range, but the soaring peaks deepened in glowing color as the gloom advanced. Seen through the mist of the bare gray trees, they were like shining angels behind the uplifted swords or trumpets of the heavenly host. Even when the sunlight had left them they shone; and, as the dusk invaded my wood, all the air, within and without, became obscurely glimmering, dark yet pulsing with glory.

When the moon appeared above the tall delicate tree-tops and began to distill her peculiar witchery through the gathering vibrating shadows, and an owl added his deep-toned lament to the awful silence, I was almost annihilated with awe. Christopher's timely return saved me from who knows what immortal spell!

The combination of orchard robbing and mystical ecstasy was violent even for a Yankee humor, but it was characteristic of the early winter. Through the dreamy days went pulsing a note of admonition which was unheeded by no one from the smallest squirrel up to the biggest man. It was pleasant to feel the same impulse thrill through our furry brethren and ourselves; and we learned to note, as it were with one eye, that a certain tree made a clean-cut pattern against the sky, and with the other that, among the withered leaves underneath it, lay plenty of butternuts. A burlap bag became our constant companion on our walks.

Apple and butternuts, fire wood, a keg of cider, a bin of coal, reams of paper and scores of paint tubes—all these promising things we laid in with eager content. Our old house, accustomed to desertion, was supremely gratified.

Beautiful and reassuring as was the December respite, we were not sorry when it ended and real

winter began. Our mood was set forward, we were in tune with our adventure and wanted to begin upon it. We desired that concentration of interest which is winter's boon.

We got it presently! On a night which seemed no colder than many of its predecessors the kitchen sink insidiously froze, and for the better part of the next day Christopher lived a life of intense concentration. Then the wind rose and it became apparent that there were several weak places in the armor of our home. Another day was devoted to the application of yards of weather-stripping. For a time it looked as if the indoor demands of winter were going to prove as preoccupying as those of outdoors in summer. But that was only because our inexperience had kept us from making adequate preparations; and by the time of the first big snow-storm, we had met and mastered most of our difficulties.

It was a Christmas snow. Nothing could have been more timely or more beautiful. We were out in it for hours, for we had decided to send our Christmas greeting to our friends in boxes of ground pine this year, and we had to make haste to rescue our spicy green lengths of treasure from a white obliteration. Clad in the village store garments which, a few weeks before, had seemed

so strange but which now seemed quite obviously suitable, we moved in a white whirling wonderland, a realm of dancing mystery.

The mood of the valley was pensive and gentle during this first prolonged fall of the snow, there was no menace in it. But when the sky cleared, a subtle change came creeping through the crystal air. It did not announce or define itself in any definite way; that was why it was so disquieting. Christopher and I glanced at each other. Then we made mutual haste to light the lamp, draw the curtains, stir the open fire, gather the books and the pipe and the bowl of apples. We shut ourselves into the heart of our house and the dear abode clasped us close and brooded protectingly over us. Before going to bed we opened the door and looked out to consult the thermometer. But we hurried back, gasping; the keen air cut the breath from our lips. As for the thermometer, it registered ten degrees below zero and during the night it went down another fifteen degrees!

The next morning we woke with a sense of excitement. How should we find our familiar world affected by the very unfamiliar temperature? It was not easy to look out on it, for our windows were thickly furred with frost; but, scratching peep-holes here and there, we caught dazzling

glimpses of a gleaming orchard and lawn. Later, when the sun was fully up, we put on all the clothes we could find and went outdoors. Not that we really needed so many wraps. The cold was so intense that it burned; there was white fire in the frost and it tingled in our veins. The mood of the day was triumphant. Against a brilliant blue sky the hills lifted their crests in peaks and domes of chiselled silver. Across the floor of the valley the fields of snow stretched unbroken and gleaming; deep blue shadows lay by the fence posts and the trunks of trees. The brooks were fettered. Through caverns and grottoes of snow-laden ice they made a difficult tortuous way, tinkling musically. The pines and spruces were heaped with snow. In the glittering whiteness, their branches gave comforting touches of color and warmth.

What a day! It was so exhilarating that we wanted incessantly to shout and sing and leap and run. When the sun went down and the shadow began to creep up the eastern mountain range, driving the deepening glory before it, we were breathless with admiration. From gold to orange, from orange to rose, from rose to glowing ruby, the color grew and flamed. The hills were transfigured. The sight of them was like the sound of some great symphony, vibrating with trumpets.

At last the tip of Green Peak was left like a lingering note, like a single perfect jewel glowing above the twilight. But even after the dusk had claimed all the still winter world, light and color came beating back out of the clear, pulsing west, and the white hills shone obscurely. Then later the stars! Hung in the fathomless sky, they blazed in such multitudes that the imagination reeled beneath them.

It was days like this that made Christopher and me realize how little we had missed by not going to the city. The knowledge surprised us somewhat. We had made sure that, however the country might recompense us, we should still feel the lack of music and picture exhibitions and plays and all that ministers so variously to the life of the spirit in a big city. But we had not counted on the power of one great interest to fill all channels if it gets an undisputed chance. Green Peak and West Mountain were perfectly capable of being opera, drama, gallery, everything that we loved and needed. Further, it seemed to us, as we progressed with the winter's experience and studied and analyzed it, that, here in the country, we were getting the essential substance of life, the material which the city takes up and re-fashions into forms of art. What are Wagner's operas but interpretations of rivers

and forests, storm clouds, heights, and all the cosmic forces that animate the universe? What are dramas but idealized rearrangements of the human history that acts itself out freely and frankly in scattered farm-houses and up and down village streets? To be sure, there is a meaning in art which crude nature does not always make manifest; the rearrangement has a significance which the original haphazard arrangement too often lacks. But every observer is capable of being, to some extent, his own artist, and Christopher and I were at fault if we could not hear symphonies in the winter wind and in the profound silence of the woods, and if we could not ring the curtain up and down upon the events that took place about us.

I have already related how many more social demands were made upon us (especially Christopher) in the country than in the city. They increased during the winter when the farming population had time to disport itself in "sociables," Science Club meetings, Grange suppers, gatherings of one sort and another. People from cities think of small towns as utterly dead in the winter ("What do you ever find to do with yourselves?"), but as a matter of fact they are humming with activity. Christopher and I played our

part and learned to render services which, a few months before, had seemed "not in our line."

"It's life, isn't it?" commented Christopher thoughtfully sometimes, "real, downright, many-sided life. So far we've known and loved it from three or four angles, but now we're dealing with the whole thing. It's great." And, doffing his absurd village store carpet slippers, he would don a pair of huge boots and dash off to lend a hand in the harvesting of ice.

The valley is not so inconsistent as to demand versatility of its inhabitants without practicing the interesting virtue in its own ever-changing moods. This was no news to us. Had we not watched the fluctuations of many summers? But we had supposed that the winter would prove the most stable and uniform of the seasons, perhaps even a little monotonous, and we were surprised to find that, on the contrary, it had a much wider range of variety than summer, spring or autumn. There is no other difference so violent as that between brown fields and snowy fields, between bare hills and hills glittering with frost, and this sort of contrast was often wrought in the course of a few hours.

On the whole, I think that we liked the look of the valley better without the snow than with it.

That also surprised us. We were not prepared for the wealth of color that lingered among the stripped bushes and trees. The swamps were glorious. That is a bright word but I repeat it: glorious. Sometimes when the light was just right, they revealed such depths within depths of ochre and vermilion mingled with amethyst, such warm russets and glowing reds that Christopher's palette became a veritable Joseph's coat before them.

The woods, too, disclosed new beauties. With the falling of the leaves, they had given up much of their secret mystery, but they still retained the trick of exquisite surprises. Unforgettable was the delicate, ghost-like look of some beech saplings seen from a little distance within the heart of a maple grove. The pale withered leaves clung to the gray branches like spirit foliage, and groups of them drifted and poised among the silent upright trunks of the larger trees. No summer foliage ever had their haunting grace. We visited them again and again, watching their gradual refinement through the inexorable action of the frost and rain. By the end of February they had changed from pale gold to an almost transparent white.

Busy as we were during this winter of our great content, we found a wide difference between the character of the city's preoccupation and that of

the country. The former is feverish, hurried, demanding speed and intensity and leaving behind it a burden of fatigue. The latter moves within margins and makes no especial haste. This boon of the margin came to seem to us one of our most priceless possessions, that which, henceforth and forever, we could not forgo. Also we found that we had escaped the irksome necessity of spending precious time and effort on undertakings that are purely conventional or that are means to ends.

But it was in the interests of a broader and richer intelligence that we found ourselves most glad of the experience. No earth child should count his human life complete unless he has shared all the experience of his earth mother, going the round of the seasons with her, learning how she adapts herself to vicissitude and what beauty and gladness she brings out of it. Storm and sunshine, growth and rest, the progress of the seasons, the changing of the skies: these are the primitive, enduring interests of our race.

It has been said that God walks in gardens. Well, certainly, his great white throne seems very definitely set up on earth, in mid-winter, in Vermont.

XV

FUNDAMENTALLY, I suppose, human nature is pretty uniform and folks are folks everywhere. But there is a distinction between city people and country folk which was borne in upon Christopher and me during our first winter in Vermont.

In January we received a visit from some New York relatives. By that time we had become so inured to the conditions of rural winter life that they had ceased to seem strange to us. One by one we had, almost unconsciously, discarded our old garments, replacing them with village store products admirably suited to our daily battles with frost and snow. We were clad as we should be, as any one should be in Vermont, as all our neighbors were; and therefore we thought no more about our attire than a woodchuck thinks about his fur.

Our relatives dazzled us when they alighted from what, in our valley, we are pleased to call "The Flier," but we had expected that. Fresh from the city, how should they look if not citified?

Derby hats, overcoats, veils, gloves, plumes, high heels, pointed toes—those were natural emanations from "The Flier"; and though they awed us a little, they constrained us not at all. To be sure we were glad when their owners said they thought they'd like to go up to their rooms and "change into something easier." We agreed with them that the place for creased trousers and patent leather shoes was in the guest-room closet. But when, after an unconscionably long absence (one advantage of real country clothes is that they can be quickly donned), our guests came down again, we narrowly saved ourselves from a most unmannerly outburst of commentary. Did they call those country clothes? Own Fifth Avenue brother to the creased trousers was this knickerbocker affair, golf-stockinged and tan-booted below, morocco-belted above and surmounted by trim outing shirt and coat. I saw Christopher glance at his "wool pants" (that was the only name the village store had for them) and his heavy sweater and moccasins, and we both giggled—then hastily told a funny story to save our courtesy. Relatives though our visitors were, we did not feel at ease with them for some time—not until the tan shoes had lost their lustre in the coal cellar and the knickerbockers had acquired an unconventional bag

by dint of exploring the recesses of the frozen kitchen sink.

A few weeks after this private family episode, the whole village was startled by the arrival at the village inn of two of our summer residents whose faces we had never seen before save in July and August. They did not come unannounced. They had written to the innkeeper a curiously excited letter, breathing adventure in every line, explaining that, never having seen the country in mid-winter, they thought they'd like to come up for a week or two of winter sports.

"Winter sports!" The innkeeper had scratched his head, sharing this letter with his interested friends. "Well, seems to me I've heard the term. But I'm afraid this ain't precisely the weather for 'em, is it?"

And we had looked dubiously at the bare ground showing through the thin covering of snow which was all that a recent thaw had left us.

However inadequate our preparations for them may have been, the winter sporters' preparations for us were elaborate. They dismounted at the station muffled to their ears in furs, fur-capped and fur-mittened. One would have thought they were on their way to the North Pole. They must have been somewhat disconcerted to be met by a wheeled

surrey, but they bravely surmounted the disillusion. "Too cold to snow, I suppose. Well, that's fine." The surrey driver declared afterwards that, though their fur-enveloped foreheads were dripping, they shivered happily all the way up the valley, jouncing through the rutty, soggy roads.

Arrived at the inn, they, like our guests of a few weeks before, betook themselves at once to their rooms accompanied by many trunks. Thence they emerged in an hour or so clad in outfits which must have taxed all the manufacturer's ingenuity and which gave our village a shock from which it has not yet recovered. Deep snow traffic had evidently been the idea which had governed the selection of their wardrobes and to that end they had furled and reefed and abbreviated as much as possible. Their legs were encased in high, fleece-lined, waterproof boots, not at all like the village store arctics familiar to us, but very stylish affairs, trim and elegant. He wore knickerbockers, and she wore a skirt—but could one call it a skirt? It came nowhere near her knees and flared coquettishly, showing her nether garments of brown corduroy. To those of us who were not country born and bred, a ballet dancer suggestion was inevitable. Parading down our demure village street over the thin layer of snow, the effect was so

startling that all the front window curtains of the houses became profoundly agitated.

For sheer charity's and decency's sake, we all fell to and prayed for a blizzard that night. But our prayers remained unanswered. Perhaps heaven thought we ought to be shocked out of a conservatism which had prevented most of our women from dressing fashionably ever since short skirts came in; perhaps it wanted to let us see what the human spirit can do by way of refusing disillusion. The latter revelation was magnificent. These two city people had come among us for the sake of enjoying winter sports under arctic conditions; and during ten days of mild, open weather, they continued steadfastly to carry out their programme. Every morning the attentive village saw them start out on a day of adventure and exploration, prepared for every possible emergency. Their costumes were as above described, varied by woolen scarfs of different bright hues. At his belt the man carried a small hatchet and knife and a pistol—in case night overtook them afar in the snowy waste and they had to make camp and live on the land. Skis were on their feet, and far behind them, at the end of a long rope, trailed an object which looked uncommonly like Freddy Brewster's flexible flier (neglected by its owner

now for obvious reasons) but gravely referred to by them as a sledge. This bore their duffle, consisting of blankets, frying-pan, coffee-pot and lunch basket. The problem of finding snow enough to receive the imprint of their skis must have been a serious one with them, though of course they never admitted it. But fortunately our meadows are wide, if not always deep, and by taking a slightly different direction each day, the explorers managed to continue to tread virgin snows. By the end of the week they had covered the valley everywhere with long streaks of brown winter grass. Their general daily direction was always the same: toward a mountain facing north-east, where the snow accumulates most deeply and lingers longest. There, I daresay, they succeeded in finding a drift or two. It is probable that, to this day, they talk about their adventures among the deep snows of mid-winter in the Green Mountains. Wt shall certainly never stop talking about those clothes of theirs.

So far I have written as if the difference between city people and country folk were altogether one of self-conscious attire. But of course the distinction lies deeper than that; or at least, it is the self-consciousness that gives it significance rather than the attire. Perhaps that is just it: city people

dress up for the country, treat it as if it were something strange, pose for it a little. Whereas we who live in the country know that it is the real thing, it is "it," and city life is the existence to be self-conscious about.

Is it fair to say that, on the whole, city people play at country life rather than live it? Of course many of them have established country homes. But, for the most part, they either maintain retinues of servants (according to no legitimate country tradition) or they do not pretend to live normally—they "camp out" for the season.

"For the season": that is another of their significant phrases. What season? Christopher and I have come to feel that, of the four seasons of the year, one is about as important as another and that only by living through them all can we fully share the life of our beloved valley. "The season"! Arrogant term! April and November laugh across it at each other.

Yes, I am afraid that city people are sometimes a little arrogant. They do not in the least mean to be so, and perhaps the condition is so subtle that it is part of the nature of things and therefore not worth criticizing. It is a matter of point of view. City people regard the country as created to be admired and exploited by them—one of their lux-

uries. Country folk regard it as the natural environment of everyday, busy human life, common to all. They take it as a matter of course and are quite simply and honestly themselves in it. Modestly, too. "Our valley," "our mountains," "our brooks" are summer cottage phrases. And it is the cottager who goes to work to set his imprint on the landscape, terracing the rocky pastures, breaking the skyline with his bungalows, spoiling the brooks with his dams and artificial lakes.

After all, what *parvenus* they all are, these city people! Long before their Fifth Avenue shops were erected and their boots and ballet skirts devised, we and our arctics and our wool pants were dwelling quietly in the snow (or thaw), taking the world as we found it and adapting ourselves to it. It has always seemed to us on the whole pretty good (though there have been days when we have thought less well of it), but never anything to be held at arm's length and admired. It was meant for a man to lose himself in, and, losing, find himself, immensely and unconsciously augmented; a place in which to work rather than play. It was it, we were we: that was all there was to it, until these city people came along and called our attention to the fact that we were living in an art museum instead of in the universe. Then——

But it is time I ended this chapter. I have just remembered that Christopher was born in Harrisburg and I in Philadelphia and that, until a few years ago, we both lived in New York.

XVI

AS a matter of fact, we are sometimes afraid that the city taint will cling to us always, that we shall never succeed in becoming thoroughly steeped in rusticity. And that fear depresses and humbles us.

I shall never forget how shocked we were by a chance conversation we overheard between Sammy Pierce, passing our house on his way to school, and a stranger strolling up the road. Our windows were open and we heard every word.

"Hello, sonny! You belong in these parts?"

"Yep."

"Well, you know all the folks then. Who lives in this house?"

Sammy mentioned our name.

"City people or country folk?"

"City."

It was too cruel! We turned and gazed at each other, surprise and chagrin and perplexity reflected from face to face. Tacitly we understood and admitted that the verdict came from a reliably repre-

sentative source. But what had we done to deserve it? Wherein had we failed?

The revelation was made at a particularly trying time, for we were just back from a flying trip to New York which had made us realize that we had completely lost our urbanity. That had been good news to us, we had delighted in it. Putting up at a small hotel and registering from Vermont, we had found ourselves showered with handbills advertising spectacular shows highly recommended as "The Farmer's Delight," "The Stranger's Recreation"; and during our whole sojourn we had never ventured into the street without being cautioned and directed by the deeply interested and solicitous elevator boy. "I expect you find this quite a lively town. Yes'm. Well, you want to be careful crossing Broadway. And you don't want to miss seeing the Hippodrome."

On Sunday morning I had drifted into a small church and had immediately been accosted by a benevolent, white-haired parishioner. "Good morning. You're a stranger. Well, we're very glad to have you come and worship with us. You are a resident of——"

"Vermont," I supplied.

"Ah? That's very nice. Let me introduce you to one or two of our people before the service be-

gins. Mrs. Patterson, come over here and meet this lady from the country."

Yes, Vermont was "the country"—all of it, even its towns—frankly, blessedly country—and we were its residents. With shouts of joy we returned to it, only to learn from the lips of Sammy Pierce that, through some subtle failure or lack, we were not qualified to rank as true country folk. The city disowned us, but the country would not recognize us. The blow was severe.

What was the matter? We discussed the subject thoroughly at our next meal.

"It's certainly not our clothes," I began, surveying Christopher's flannel shirt and sweater and glancing down at my gingham dress. "I think I haven't told you that yesterday, when we were doing errands in Manchester and I had lost track of your whereabouts, I looked out of the window of the drug store and said to myself. 'There goes a typical old hayseed,' and, lo and behold, it was you!"

Christopher laughed delightedly.

"That makes me feel better," he said. "No, it can't be our clothes. Nor our food." He helped himself to some baked beans and a piece of cheese. "Perhaps it's my profession. Landscape painters aren't really indigenous."

"But I suspect," I demurred, "that our neighbors consider your painting a harmless pastime and your potatoes and apples and corn your real profession."

"Well, then it's your flower garden. It's entirely too big and indulges in too many fancy experiments for the garden of a typical housewife. You ought to have a few petunias and nasturtiums in the front yard and a lot of potted geraniums in the windows."

"Perhaps," I admitted. "But everyone can see that my poor garden grows smaller and more neglected every year. No, I don't believe it's anything so obvious as clothes or food or occupation; it's some trick, some attitude, some flavor, of which we're unconscious. Slight things are always most potent, you know. Perhaps it's just because, when we go to see people, we're more apt to knock at the front door than at the back. And, now that I come to think of it, I realize that people hardly ever knock at our kitchen door. Oh, that's damaging!"

We were both of us really troubled about the situation, we soberly took it to heart; and, for the next few weeks, we watched and studied and criticized ourselves and one another. Never did any proselytes of a new religion more wistfully long to

acquire perfect ease of genuflexion and liturgical response than we longed to seem to the country manner born. "Christopher, you shouldn't get your hair cut quite so often." "For heaven's sake, let's stop using finger bowls." I locked the front door and made all my callers come around to the rear of the house where, as often as not, I entertained them in the kitchen.

But, even while thus homelily entertaining, there was one trick which I could not master, one profound habit which I never could adopt. And I suppose the failure will always stand between me and the goal of true rusticity which is my ambition.

It is simple enough, the habit. It consists merely in turning the head and occasionally the shoulders to look out of the window when somebody passes the house. All native Vermonters do the thing to perfection and so instinctively that it seems as inevitable as the bending of the knees to sit down or the drawing in of the breath to speak. Cosily chatting beside the fire, intent on the subject in hand, they have only to hear a sound in the road to turn away, still chatting perhaps, and look and watch until they have made sure who is going by and have registered all available details. Then they turn back and go on with the conversation.

Now why can I not do this? I try and try, practicing gaily with Christopher and patiently by myself, but always to no avail. I feel self-conscious and awkward. It seems to me discourteous to turn away from the person with whom I am talking and gaze at somebody else. Yet I know it is not; it is as humanly natural as all other country customs, and the failure to adopt it brands me as lacking in some essential rustic quality. For I am afraid the bottom truth is that I really do not much care who is passing the house, and that is distinctly an urban indifference.

I remember well how mortified I was one day when a neighbor called me up on the telephone and asked if a load of furniture had passed our house on its way up the hill road.

"Why, I—I'm afraid—I—I don't know," I stammered.

"That's funny," she answered after a slight pause to adjust herself to the strangeness of my way of putting the thing. "I made sure they'd be there by this time."

"But I said I didn't know," I repeated miserably.

"Well, I wonder—would it be too much trouble for you to call me up when they do come?" she

continued, still ignoring the incredible reality I was trying to convey to her.

In the end I was forced to call up another neighbor and put the unhappy question; then, learning that, "Why, yes, they went by twenty minutes ago —you must have been down cellar," I relayed the information and felt myself disgraced.

It is no light matter to fail of one's heart's desire by one small, obstinate disability.

Most of the country habits, however, seem second nature to us now, and most of the country points of view have become thoroughly our own.

Take funerals.

Time was when we avoided them and thought our neighbors morbid for dropping everything in order to attend them. It seemed to us almost indecent to make such haste to intrude on a fellow townsman's grief. But that was because we did not understand. Oh, no! we did not understand. We know now that the interest is anything but intrusive or morbid, that it is a deeply human response to a noble summons, and that a country funeral is one of the grandest as well as one of the most poignantly touching experiences an attentive heart can have.

We discovered this when, because Christopher had been asked to be one of the pall bearers, we

attended the funeral of a village resident. It does not matter now who he was. The universality rather than the particularity of the experience was what made it so impressive.

The service was held in the church and at least an hour before the time appointed, vehicles began passing our house on their way thither. When we arrived we found the church fuller than it ever is on a Sunday morning. There was an air—how shall I define or describe it? . . . an air of expectancy, almost of exaltation about the people, as if they knew that something great awaited them. They sat motionless, but one could feel that their spirits were profoundly moved. When the door opened behind them and the six pall bearers, two by two, came up the aisle, they rose as a migrating flock of birds rises to begin its flight.

Christopher had dressed up for the occasion, but, though I had accepted his doing so as a matter of course, I was rather sorry now. For some of his companions had come just as they were, in flannel shirts and heavy boots, and their appearance had an effect of rugged, homely sincerity which I found beautiful. From the hard-working, earth-dealing heart of their lives they had come to pay tribute to death, and their simple

directness made human dissolution seem as quietly natural as the falling of autumn leaves

The casket, covered with flowers, was wheeled by a middle-aged man with a compassionate, fatherly face. From his professional-looking black gloves I knew he must answer to the term, so opprobrious in the city, of undertaker. But I likewise reflected that I had never heard the term here in Vermont. "Will you please call up Mr. Nesbit?" had been the subdued formula with which a bereaved neighbor had asked to use our telephone. Looking upon him now, I understood that, like the doctor and the minister, he was one of the fathers of the Great Events, and my heart went out to him. How well he must know all the valley folk! They were his charges. When he manipulated the casket into place on the rug before the pulpit, I was irresistibly reminded of the dealings of a parent with a child in a perambulator, and the comparison did not seem grotesque to me.

Behind the casket the mourners trooped, infinitely more touching in their improvised, nondescript black garments than people I had seen elsewhere who looked as if they had spent the last two days in the dressmaker's hands. One woman wore a long black veil over a red hat; another had on a black blouse and a tan skirt. They were not weep-

ing; their faces looked awed and acquiescent. Only their shoulders drooped as if a new weight had come on them.

The service was beautiful. Yet if I had known what kind it was to be, I should have wanted more than ever to stay away, for I thought I preferred such things to be strictly impersonal. There was music by a quartette—"My faith looks up to Thee" and "Lead kindly light"; there was a prayer and a grave reading of the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians; and there was what the valley people still call a "funeral sermon." The latter was delivered by a native of the valley, retired from active ministry but frequently called on to serve with his beautiful, sympathetic gift. He spoke that day in an allegory full of the significance of the passing seasons, of the strength of the mountains and the peace of the fields—spoke as Christ used to speak to his people in homely parables. As he leaned over the casket and talked, so quietly, so clearly, he seemed to be leading us all up to the great Gate and holding it open while one of us went through and the rest gazed after him.

When the noble benediction had been pronounced—"Now may he who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ"—there was a pause and a silence and then Mr. Nesbit came for-

ward and, removing some of the flowers, lifted the lid of the casket and stood aside.

Again, if I had known this was to happen, I should have shrunk and recoiled. But, not knowing, I realized the response almost before the summons and was on my feet borne forward by the wave that swept the churchful of people. Not morbid, not distasteful was this universal movement, but an instinctive, inevitable tribute of life to death, an august "Hail and farewell!" Never in my experience had I felt such a passionate sense of oneness with any company of people as I felt with my neighbors as, side by side, one after another, we went up the aisle. I was they, they were I, and we were together the whole human race. There in our little church among the mountains the two great mysteries, life and death, stood face to face and lo, they also were not two but one.

Out in the cemetery the sun was shining dreamily through an autumn mist. The hills stood round about, stripped of their leaves and austere but very gentle in their gray peace. The valley was silent. The harvests had been garnered and the birds were flown. The hazy blue sky bent low over us. What a time to be gathered away into the arms of the great Mother! What a time to creep back and rest, so as to be ready to begin over

again! Nobody wept. Country hearts share the patience and selflessness of the dumb creatures and the natural processes with which they associate. "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes"—the solemn rite was ended, the commitment made, and, one by one, group by group, the people turned away.

Christopher's hand clasped mine as he came up beside me and for a long time neither of us spoke. Then,

"Oh Christopher!" I murmured, "I am henceforth and forever a very member incorporate of this community."

XVII

IT was not, however, as if we had entirely lost the city, for there was Rutland, only thirty-five miles away, and there was our trusty Ford.

In big cities—New York or Chicago or Paris—we had both of us always hated the business of shopping. It was too huge, that was the trouble. There were too many shops, too many articles, too many possible answers to our modest needs. Also it was too impersonal. No touch of humanity seemed to lurk in the great establishments or in the bored attendants. We had accepted our dislike as part of the permanent order of things, and its dissipation was certainly the last miracle we had expected of Vermont.

Accordingly, it was from the point of view of the old settled repugnance that I began, one beautiful spring morning:

"Christopher, I'm awfully sorry, but I've just got to have some new shoes before very long. What can I do about it? It's too much of a risk

to get them through a mail order catalogue and——"

To my surprise, Christopher broke in with anything but the resigned expression which I had anticipated:

"Well, I've got to have some too, and a hat and some shirts and—oh, lots of things. Suppose we run up to Rutland."

"Rutland!" I was astonished at the thrill of excitement that pervaded me. Visions of city streets flashed before me, I glimpsed a policeman, a trolley car, a restaurant, shop windows. But why should I want to see these things? They pertained to the city and I was wedded to the country. Moreover, if I did want to see them, it was absurd to seek them in a town of twenty thousand inhabitants. Rutland! I caught my breath, flew to clear the table and wash the breakfast dishes, made all haste to don the best looking clothes I had.

"What's the matter with me?" I said a little later as we sped northward through the radiant spring world. "I'm as pleased as a child on his way to a circus, and it's not just because I'm having a beautiful drive either. If you were to turn off on that side road, I daresay we'd find ourselves in even lovelier country than this, but I should be disappointed."

Christopher laughed, glancing sidewise from the steering wheel.

"You want to see the city, and so do I," he said. "But I should hate to be on my way to New York."

"Of course. For people like us Rutland embodies the city idea much more satisfactorily than a huge, distracting area like New York. I daresay we are going to find that Rutland supremely typifies urbanity to us."

It was true, he was right. As we mounted a hill and swung around a curve which brought our destination into sight, we both cheered. There it was, The City, all cities, lying compactly among its hills, with its church steeples pricking the sky, and we, the country, were speeding toward it for a draught of the refreshment which it alone could give.

When we felt the asphalt beneath our wheels we sat up straighter and I adjusted both our hats. (Christopher was of course intent on observing traffic regulations.) "You do need some new clothes," I murmured; "and we'd both better get our shoes blackened before we do anything else."

Two streets of shops, maybe three; a policeman standing beside a semaphore, seriously holding back a milk wagon and a Ford, while he encouraged a load of potatoes and two other Fords

to proceed on their way; a trolley car; a whiff of soft coal smoke from the railroad yards; a peanut stand; a cinema; shop windows; a restaurant; two or three hotels: the city—oh, the city! We parked our own Ford and got out, elated and intent.

It would take me too long to describe in detail the events and discoveries of the next four or five hours. They were a revelation to us of what the city and country can do when they work hand in hand. We separated because our errands naturally took us into different shops, but we continually encountered each other unexpectedly in the street (that was part of the novel fun, a brand new experience) and then we paused to compare notes. "Never saw anything like it. Why, I've had everything charged." "They certainly are friendly people. I'm having a lot of clothes sent home on approval."

As a matter of fact, though I had never seen her until that morning, I felt before noon that a certain young woman in a coat and suit department was one of my oldest friends. Her treatment of me was something entirely new in my shopping experience. There was no sense of hurry about her —that was the first reassuring element in our intercourse. Then she gave me her whole attention as if she really enjoyed helping me to provide my-

self with some new clothes. Yet she did not despise my old ones; not a single disparaging glance did she cast. Ours was a human transaction, that was the gist of the matter. We were two women conferring together upon a subject that we both found important and interesting.

"Why don't you let me send them all home?" she suggested. "Then you can be sure you're not making any mistake."

"But," I objected, "I don't live in Rutland, I've never been here before, and of course I've no charge account."

"That doesn't matter," she answered. "I'm sure the head of the department would have no objection."

"But—but—" I stammered by and by when she suggested that I put on a certain coat and wear it out in the street to hunt up Christopher and get his criticism, "do you really think it's safe to give your customers such privileges?"

She laughed.

"We do more than that for our people. Why, the other day, your village doctor's wife blew in here with her husband's emergency kit in her hand. She'd caught the train in a hurry and grabbed the wrong bag. She had an appointment with the photographer and didn't know what to do because

she'd left her best blouse behind. But we fixed her up. We loaned her one of our blouses."

I was immensely intrigued.

"Do you suppose the railroad let her charge her fare?"

"Maybe," my new friend assented. "Or maybe she borrowed some money from someone in the train."

So that was the way things were done in Vermont! I felt that I had a great deal to talk over with Christopher when I met him for luncheon, and I was prompt in keeping my appointment at the restaurant. I found him waiting for me with a bright-eyed and amused and reflective face. Apparently he also was brimming with communication.

But first we must select our viands from a large menu card and that engrossed us for five minutes. "Gee! I'd forgotten there were so many different kinds of things to eat. Let's have everything we don't get at home." The waitress stood at a distance, understandingly giving us time to take our bearings. How many bewildered rustics, emerging from dusty Fords, she had served in her day! As for us, not Sherry's, not the Waldorf had ever given us such a sense of epicurean adventure as that Rutland restaurant.

In the afternoon I took Christopher to meet my new friend in the coat and suit department, and he took me to help him select a hat in the Men's Haberdashery. Then we both went to the dentist's and there surprise crowned surprise in the discovery that in Rutland even the dentists are friendly. We gave so much thought to conversation about this and that (Vermont politics, Vermont scenery and fishing, Vermont literature) that we hardly realized we were having cavities filled.

It was a great day. Before we reclaimed our Ford from the side street where it had been patiently and safely awaiting us, we went to the Five and Ten Cent Store, the market, the bookshop, the bakery, all the establishments the like of which our village does not know. Christopher got his hair cut and I bought a new powder puff. I even surreptitiously slipped into the railroad station and watched a train pull out.

Yes, it was a great day. I was too tired to be sorry when it was over and, our tonneau piled with packages, we slipped out into the quiet country where, after all, we belonged, but I fetched a sigh and glanced back. "The dentist says I've a tooth that will need attention in a few weeks," I remarked hopefully.

"Didn't I tell you?" cried Christopher. "Rut-

land gives us the cream of the city without such quarts of skim milk. It's going to be any amount of fun to have it to go to once in a while."

"But we wouldn't live there."

"Oh, no! The country's the place to live in, the city's the place to visit. The country's the real thing and the more the city's affected by it the better the city is."

"Rutland is human."

"New York is a monstrosity."

"Do you know, it's soberly true that if I were going to Paris, I'd buy all my clothes for the journey in Rutland and expect to wear them till I got home again."

There was a long pause. The afternoon hills moved slowly about and above us as we sped in among them, the shadows were long. How lovely the world was, how dear and good our life in this corner of it!

"Christopher," I mused, "we're children, aren't we—middle-aged children? I suppose the zest we have found in this day's experience would seem to most people incredibly puerile."

Christopher glanced at me. There was a volume of wise and humorous comment in his eyes.

"According to a very intelligent Person," he

said, "being little children is our only chance of attaining the kingdom of heaven."

"Why won't Vermont do?"

"For heaven, you mean? Well, there's a tradition that there are no Vermonters in heaven, for when they get there they won't stay."

XVIII

IT may have been noticed that Christopher and I like to share our experiences. But there are a few adventures that, if undertaken at all, ought to be undertaken alone; and, as the spring drew on, I one day announced my intention of "going warbling, quite by myself."

Christopher looked at me quizzically. It is an unfortunate fact that I have no voice for singing.

"Can't make me mad!" he retaliated rudely.

But I missed him when I was out in the fields, for it was an utterly heavenly day. The shadbush was coming into bloom and delicate young green was beginning to clothe the woods. Rapturous season! On such a day the soberest human spirit grows young as the newest-born lamb and gambols ecstatically. Oh, unfolding flowers! Oh, pushing grass! Oh, shouting, darting birds! Bless ye the Lord!

Ideally one should need no excuse for wandering indefinitely through spring fields and woods. But human nature is not yet quite ideal and, discon-

certingly, our careful virtues are sometimes found to be as mistaken as our faults. We consider it virtuous to be purposeful, to refrain from spending our time in pursuits that "get us nowhere." But, since a certain amount of irresponsibility is necessary to us, especially in the spring, we have had recourse to subterfuge and, by inventing the thing called "nature study," have silenced our scruples and got what we wanted. As if the sum of the world's welfare could be increased by anyone's identification of a scrap of green and yellow feathers as a magnolia rather than a myrtle warbler! Particularly when, in order to make the distinction, one has to leave one's husband's bread unbaked.

There were various spots among which I might choose the scene of my warbler activities, but that which on the whole promised most was a patch of tangled bushes and young trees on the outskirts of a wood. Birds of all sorts love this place. It gives them both freedom and privacy, it supplies them with food, and it enables them to tease nature students to the top of their bent. That last is a very important point in warbler psychology.

In the old days when Christopher and I were "summer cottagers," I used to carry a bird book with me on my walks; but I always felt uncom-

monly foolish, sitting down under the trees, turning the pages feverishly, murmuring, "Two white wing bars—no, that's wrong—a yellow throat—well, maybe it is yellow, though it looks white to me. A black line through the eye. Oh! the creature's laughing at me." Moreover, the book was in my way when I charged in among the bushes in yet another effort to trace that black line, and I dropped it and lost it and had the mischief of a time finding it again. So, on my last expedition, I took only a small, shabby pair of opera glasses which I could slip into my pocket. Details as to wing-bars and eye lines I decided to defer until I should get home, with the comforting realization that thus I might forget or confuse them a little and so be enabled to conclude, "Yes, that must have been a Philadelphia vireo," when probably it wasn't at all.

It will be perceived that warbling, as conducted by me, is an entirely shameless proceeding.

It is not wholly unmoral, however. On the contrary, it seems to suggest and illustrate a complete philosophy of life. Patience, perseverance, good temper: those required attributes are obvious enough. And self-control. Only he who can rule body and spirit will ever get maddening tufts of feathers focussed long enough to see them

at all. But the philosophy goes deeper than that. It finds its base in the great mysterious principle that the way to secure the best things in life is not to rush after them furiously but to wait on them with an open mind, and that he who seeks earnestly for some explicit thing is quite as likely as not to find something else.

On this particular day which I am remembering, I started out on my quest with an open mind. I entered the patch of bushes and gave myself over to destiny. The sweet spring influences surrounded me, the hills stood grandly beneath the radiant sky, the sun brooded warmly. How good life was, how infinitely peaceful! I felt my whole being relax and expand in the oneness which is the soul of creation. Then, presto! a flash through the young leaves of a neighboring tree, a challenging call, a glimpse of feathers in rapid motion, and my struggle was on.

Not that there ought to have been any struggle about it. The only rational thing to be done was to sit quite still. But that was not easy. Having advertised his presence, the warbler betook himself to a half-fledged tree in the middle distance, not near enough to be observed in detail. There he perched on an exposed limb which, if he had been nearer, would have made him an excellent

mark for the opera glasses, and there, in spite of all his racial tradition and personal habit, he imitated my philosophy of sitting still. This was amazingly clever in him. He seemed to know perfectly that if he stayed there long enough—and not so very long either—I would be tempted to rise and make my way cautiously to him, persuaded that for once my policy of quiescence was a mistake. Whereupon, if I did this, of course, with a dart and a flash, he would be gone, either farther into the thicket or, more likely, back to the spot I had just left.

No, I would not gratify him. I would stick out his wiles and delays, waiting till his spurious patience had exhausted itself. He could not fool me! I settled down to the business of sitting him out.

But presently my quiescence began, in its turn, to torment me. My gaze remained focussed on my chosen bird, but out of the tail of my eye I saw—what? Something stirred in the bush close beside me, a nameless presence emerged and went softly exploring the leaf buds not three yards away. Should I look at him? The chance was so good. And perhaps he might turn out to be as interesting as the creature perched over yonder. After all, it is part of my philosophy to take the blessings

which the woods provide. So I unriveted my gaze from the tree and glanced quickly at the bush. A summer yellow bird! As familiar to me as a robin or a song sparrow! Back went my disappointed glance to the tree, only to find that the unknown warbler had as completely disappeared as last winter's snow.

This was maddening. But of course it did not do to yield to exasperation. Rather, it was more than ever imperative to sit still. For most birds are curious, and, for all we know, they may have their own observations to make: "Forehead somewhat lined, shoulders stooping a little, ink-mark on the third finger—that must be a scholar." Or: "Streaks of paint irregularly disposed, absent-minded expression, negligent attire—probably an artist." Or: "Glossy black, with a narrow white wing-bar near the tip and a white band around the neck—a clergyman." I flattered myself that it would take a pretty experienced warbler to classify me, my country life has involved me in so many avocations, and I sat and awaited the return of my bird. He came in the end and brought his mate with him. Then, for as long a session as I had the heart to keep Christopher dinnerless, the two of them appeared and vanished before me, beside me, above me, around me, resuming full warbler activ-

ity, so that I could seldom scrutinize them, but giving me innumerable glimpses from which to build up an impression. Meantime, they discussed me in a fashion which I daresay I might have found embarrassing if I had understood it.

My intentions toward Christopher and his dinner were good and sincere, but, on the way home to fulfill them, I was betrayed into a disastrous departure from the path. A bird I was perfectly sure I had never seen before flew over my head, almost brushing my hair with its wings, and perched on a young tree standing in a tangle of bushes. He was so near that, by moving only a few yards, I could focus him; and, really, I was confident that he was a rare specimen. So I went after him.

What a chase he led me! Through tangled bushes and briers, over rotten logs, over the tussocks of a swamp, in and out among the trees. Never once did I see him clearly enough to get anything but the vaguest impression of his markings, and when I reached home exhausted, I could only sigh to the hungry but uncomplaining Christopher, "Well, it must have been some rare migrant. At least I'm glad I caught a glimpse of him."

The climax of this experience came the next

morning when, still tired and vexed, I was puttering in the garden. What did I hear? What did I see perching tamely on one of our fence-posts? Not the tricksy fugitive of the day before? But this familiar visitor was a common "summer resident," a bird I had known all my life. The humiliation of the discovery was extreme.

On the whole, I am glad that the warbling season comes only once a year.

XIX

WHEN we had lived in the country a year, we realized that we were indebted to it not only for spiritual boons beyond our highest hopes, but also for material succor that, in the reign of high prices, was invaluable. The old established firm of Sun, Rain, Earth and Company had fed us bountifully.

It was Christopher who first took the hint of this generous intention and communicated it to me. I was standing before a great basket of early imported spinach in the village store, hesitating dangerously between my natural inclination and the repressing influence of the probable price, when Christopher murmured in my ear, "There are lots of young dandelions behind the studio." The effect was magical. I turned and left the store with haste and, speeding homeward, armed myself with a basket and a kitchen knife and was soon digging happily.

The spring sunshine was warm on my back, bluebirds and song sparrows caroled around me, the

tender young grass was succulent and succulent were the young dandelions with which my basket presently overflowed. On the step of the side porch I picked them over, eliminating various undesirable insects and twigs; in the kitchen sink I washed them in many waters; and when I had boiled them and chopped them, salted and peppered and buttered them, we had a dinner which made us laugh spinach to scorn. No market product ever had such a zestful flavor, full of the tang and impulse of the young year. And all for nothing! Then and there I resolved that I would not miss a single gracious opportunity which Nature might afford me during the year.

But, as profit is not Nature and Company's method, so neither is advertising, and its beneficiaries have to look alive. Cowslips came after dandelions, and they appeared so silently in the swamp that we almost let them grow beyond the proper stage of edibility. Not quite, however. In rubber boots, splashing oozily, Christopher and I waded in among the chorusing frogs and fluting red-winged blackbirds, and gathered great handfuls of the rather unpromising leathery leaves. They were good, though, delicious; and once more we had a dinner fit for the king of the Beatitudes.

It was almost June when the milkweed ap-

peared, and the wildness and tang of the earlier season had given place to gentler influences. I realized this when I noticed how much more slowly and thoughtfully I gathered the new provender, wandering down the road with my basket, stopping to smell the wild roses and greet the daisies and buttercups. The deepening meadows lay in the sun, with bobolinks exulting over them, and the shining hills were at last completely clothed in their summer robes of green. A great content stole through my being, a restful confidence that had something primitive about it, as if, in my new dependence on Nature, I were harking back to an old Golden Age when simple people quite literally took no thought for the morrow and knew that somehow or other they would be fed. It was a sensation precious beyond any telling. I wish I could set all the troubled people in the world to gathering milkweed. But let them cull only the little topmost leaves and let them allow an hour for cooking if they would know its full excellence.

"But, after all, really, you know, we aren't rabbits," said Christopher thoughtfully one day. It was a timely remonstrance. For, just about then, our neighbors began going up the hill with pails in their hands and I knew that the wild strawberry season was on.

How shall one describe the joys of wild strawberrying? Everything about it is beautiful: the situation—a hillside meadow, deep (but not too deep) with June grass, full of birds and flowers, looking out over the valley to the blue, shadow-swept hills; the loveliness of the largess lurking among the cool grass stems, glowing and graceful and so fragrant that the whole meadow seems a bowl of incense. The fragrance is almost more delicious than the taste. But the taste leaves nothing to be desired, and he who stoops and gathers and eats feels a sacramental significance in the flavor which lies upon his tongue.

I have nothing whatever to say against the enthusiasm which prompts my neighbors to take milk pails instead of quart cups when they go wild strawberrying, and keeps them picking and hulling and cooking day after day. Their winter cellars are the richer for marvelous preserves. But I think they can hardly know the pure, serene joy of one who picks only a quart at a time. For picking and hulling on a large scale is downright hard work, and hard work does tire the body and dull the edge of the spirit. I like to pick slowly and I really prefer a meadow where the fruit does not hang too thick. Profusion is bewildering and exhausting, keeping the attention strained; but a discreet dispersal is

satisfactory. One gathers and rises and wanders, stops to look out over the valley and follow the flight of a goldfinch; one even sits down now and then and gives himself over to the mood of the day. As the ancient Israelites gathered only enough manna for their immediate need, so do I like to deal sparingly with wild strawberries. They are too exquisite to be profaned.

Raspberries are not so interesting as strawberries; but, by the time they take up the tale of the year's generosity, one's spirit has matured with the season and settled into a sobriety which craves repose rather than excitement. In the heavy July heat the open meadows are often oppressive (ask the hay makers!) and the business of hunting and stooping and rising, hunting and stooping again, might easily become irksome. Better is it to stand erect on the edge of an upland pasture, with the cool breath of the neighboring woods on one's cheek and the ineffable song of the hermit thrush in one's ears, and pick from a bush laden so lavishly with ruby fruit that in a few minutes one has all he needs and can set his pail aside and go wandering into the woods, seeking fruits of the spirit. Temperamentally I have always preferred the ebb of the year to its flow, and as the advent of the raspberry seems to mark the turn of the tide, I have a

peculiar regard for it. Though not so poetic as the strawberry, it is perhaps more philosophical; it begins to understand the secrets of quietness and humility.

Then, in August, the blackberry; and sometimes I am inclined to think this is the best of all. But probably that is just because I love its month so well. Ah, the serene beauty of the hills, wrapped in misty light, with slow, vague cloud-shadows drifting over them! The woods are silent, the brooks are low and run quietly, the sky enfolds the earth, and dreams and visions lie lurking everywhere. Yet the blackberry is not a mystical fruit. On the contrary, there is something very practical and downright about its plump, glossy sides, shining with good fellowship. That is all the better. It supplies just the right touch of obvious common sense which its transcendent environment needs by way of balance.

Christopher was so busy all summer that he could seldom find time to accompany me on my berrying expeditions. That is why this chapter has, so far, been written in the first person singular. But when late October saw all the apples gathered and all the potatoes and squashes in the cellar and when the first sharp frosts had invited us, he threw a burlap bag over his shoulder and went nutting

with me. Then came the very best pleasure of the year. Over the frost-touched hills we ranged, not because we had to go so far but because we wanted to. The repose of the year had deepened and settled until it had become an established condition; the very last hint of restlessness had gone out of it. But the air was full of vigor and zest. The stripped mountains were soft gray against the blue sky, and only the oak leaves clung here and there to their branches. The crickets phrased the great symphony of silence. We had little to say as we moved side by side, but we had so much to see and feel that we almost forgot our special errand. Not really, though, for this last boon at the hand of Nature was part of the significance of the whole blessed day. Butternuts to heap in our woodshed and crack on our hearthstone during the long winter evenings were a rich acquisition. The mood of the day was one which fostered garnering. Squirrels and chipmunks were everywhere busy, carrying booty off to their stores. Woodchucks drowsed thoughtfully at the mouths of their holes. Winter was coming and all animals who did not mean to go south must make their preparations. Christopher and I are animals, and we liked to feel our kinship with our furry brethren as, at last, turning toward home, we stopped under a butter-

nut tree and began to fill our bag. Rough, unprepossessing largess was this, lacking all the grace and amenability of the earlier offerings but hiding within it a richer nutriment than any herb or berry.

Thus we have come through a year of high prices and have almost continuously been fed for nothing. Of course there have been some trifling expenses for flour and sugar and milk and eggs, but we have afforded them more uncomplainingly since we have been able to look on them as garniture.

XX

"WHAT'S the matter?" asked Christopher.

I looked up, startled. We were lingering over our supper one stormy evening at the beginning of our second winter. The rain was drumming on the porch roof, the candle flames were quivering and shining in our four silver candle-sticks. We were very cosy. I had not intended to convey the impression that anything was the matter. In fact, I had been so lost in my meditations that I had not fully understood that they were troubling me.

"Out with it!" Christopher summoned.

I pushed back my plate and leaned my elbows on the table. (It is part of our general emancipation that we are not very rigid about table manners.)

"Well," I replied, "I suppose it's a good time to air the question. I've been thinking about it more or less frequently for several weeks. I wonder if you have too. Or do you present a duck's back to the waters of family advice?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Christopher, enlightened. "It's that letter from Cousin Mary."

"Yes," I admitted slowly, "that among other things. But there was also a talk I had with your mother, and there was a word dropped by Uncle James, and there was a postscript to a note from someone else; and, altogether, it has seemed as if a general conspiracy of remonstrance had begun."

"To the effect?" Christopher prompted.

"To the effect that you and I are making a mistake."

Christopher smoked for a moment in silence. Once, as I watched him, I saw him gather his shoulders precisely as if for a duck shake; but then he thought better of the impulse. By and by he met my eyes.

"You're right," he said: "it is a good time to air the question. We'll get after it. The point, I suppose, is that, in thus living 'apart from the world,' we'll 'get out of touch with our age,' 'out of the stream of tendency,' 'into a back-water.' Those are the phrases, aren't they?"

"Yes," I smiled, "they are. You've at least taken note of the flood that has poured over your back. The question for us is: do they mean as much as they seem to? They sound so very important."

"But while we're about it," said Christopher, gazing into the heart of the candle flame nearest him, "don't you think we may as well be thoroughgoing? Let's begin at the beginning and ask what we mean by 'the world' and by life itself."

I was immensely interested and planted my elbows more firmly between my two candle-sticks.

"Those are big questions," I replied. "I wonder if we can answer them."

"We ought to be able to, oughtn't we?" stated Christopher matter-of-factly. "Otherwise, what business have we to be living at all?"

"Well, you begin, Christopher. What does life mean to you?"

He hesitated—not as if he were at a loss, but as if he were selecting his words. And his next remark was not an answer, but a further question:

"Did you have to learn the catechism when you were a child?"

It served as an answer to me, however, and a light sprang into my mind.

"Yes!" I cried, leaning forward. "'The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.' Oh, Christopher! are you really brave enough to say that that's what life means to you?"

"It does take some courage," Christopher admitted, "and very likely I shouldn't have the

strength of mind for it if the fact hadn't been stated by such severe old moralists as the very keynote of their analysis of duty. I never get over my surprise at them. Wouldn't you have thought they'd have begun by laying down some rule of good works and salvation? But, no: just worship and joy—the simplest, easiest, most spontaneous thing. Instead of ecclesiastics, they might have been artists in an irresponsible mood. I declare!"

He suddenly laughed aloud in his renewed appreciation.

"It always calls up in my mind a picture," he went on presently. "I see a wide, billowing plain, with mountains about it and a great sky overhead —floods of sunshine, fleets of clouds, birds singing, grass waving—and in the midst of it all a man, standing with his head thrown back and his hands turned outward, simply worshipping. I can't tell you how it frees and rests and establishes me to contemplate that picture."

I contemplated it also in silence for a minute or two.

"After all," I began presently, "after all——"

"Yes," echoed Christopher eagerly. "After all! That's what I say to myself."

"After all," I continued slowly, "our human situation is simple. Here we are, created and set

to live out our days in a very beautiful and fertile world. There seems no reason why we should make any fuss. But, misery me! what a fuss we have managed to make!"

"Haven't we, just?" Christopher assented. "And mostly about nothing and to no end."

"We ought to stop."

"We must stop."

"But how?"

"Why," Christopher smiled, "when the war was on—the war to end war—one of your pacifist slogans was: the way to stop fighting is to stop fighting. I suppose the way to stop making a fuss is to stop making a fuss. We've stopped, haven't we?"

"Measurably, yes," I replied. "But we could, it was easy for us, the way presented itself. Some other people are more involved, they don't know how to get clear. Some of them don't want to, either."

"Exactly!" Christopher replied. "That's the real trouble: they don't want to. I can't believe that any man is so tied up to confusion that he couldn't free himself if he really wanted to.

"And yet," he went on after a moment, divining the flaws I was about to pick in his argument and giving them his careful attention, "I can't believe,

either, that any sane man really, in his heart of hearts, likes to make a fuss. He'd look happier about it if he did. City crowds have such worried eyes and such furrowed brows."

"But sometimes country people have stupid eyes," I put in, "and that's just as bad. Do most people anywhere look happy, Christopher?"

"Children do," Christopher replied after another thoughtful pause. "It all comes back to the big advice: become as little children. The spirit of our age is anything but direct and simple, and it makes us all unhappy. In city and country we're failing to make the most of the few important universal things."

"Such as?"

"Oh, such as life itself, the mere mystery (though it's not very mere) of seeing and hearing and feeling and loving and worshipping. Such as dawn and sunset, the march of the seasons, the growth of trees and flowers. Such as human relationships. Such as God and death and immortality."

"Instead of which——"

"Instead of which, we devote ourselves to the manufacture of cosmetics or fancy buttons or chewing gum, and we put in our spare time at the movies and grow so dyspeptic and fretful that we

have to get divorces; and then we complain that life is a tragedy."

"Poor people!" I commented soberly.

"Poor people!" Christopher echoed.

"But what's to be done about it?" I sat up between my candle-sticks and gazed at Christopher. "How can the buttons and chewing gum be suppressed, and the dawn and sunset come into their own again?"

"They can't at once." Christopher sighed and leaned forward to snuff one of his candles. "We'll all have to be patient and wait a long time. Frankly, I haven't the least idea what's to be done about it. There are reformations and revolutions enough just at present, but they most of them seem to be violent and godless and so one can't trust them. They're all so cock-sure and uncritical too. Not one of them starts out with a confession of sin. The spirit of humility has vanished from the earth. And without humility how can we become little children? At least," he qualified, "the kind of children whom Christ took in His arms."

There was a silence. We were both very grave by this time, and I am afraid our eyes were no happier than those we had been discussing.

"You don't think it's selfish in us," I ventured, coming at last to the heart of the problem that had

been troubling me, "you don't think it's selfish in us to live off here so happily, just minding our own business and letting the world wag?"

"No," Christopher answered roundly, "I don't. So long as we do mind our business and so long as the world's waggings fail to win our confidence. What else should we do?"

"Well,"—I was vague—"go to the city and work on committees for civic improvement and join organizations for promoting the welfare of the world."

"Waggings!" Christopher commented. "I don't for a minute doubt their good intentions, but I don't trust their spirit. It's too headstrong and blatant. 'The servant of the Lord must not strive nor cry.' I do wish the whole world would be quiet for awhile."

"And starve?" I put in, thinking of Russia and Central Europe.

"By no means!" Christopher replied. "It's precisely because we're quiet here, you and I, living simply, that we have a margin to spare. That might be true of many people if they didn't spend so much time and money running around and organizing. A world given over to simplicity and sharing would surely be able to supply its own needs and repair its ravages."

"You talk as if the world were a unit," I remarked.

"Well, it is, isn't it?" Christopher answered. "Religiously, philosophically, even scientifically. We really are all one, we earth people, and we suffer and thrive together. That's another reason for my belief that it isn't selfish in you and me to live off here among the mountains. If we keep our hearts open, there's no telling how much peace and gladness may flow through us to others. Some hurried wretch may be this minute a little less harassed because you're sitting there between your candle flames."

"Oh, Christopher!" I cried, "that's a delightful theory, but it's dangerous. So a millionaire might argue about his fortune: 'Never mind, some poor man feels the richer today, even though he may not know it, because I have all this gold.' "

Christopher smiled, but he shook his head.

"Gold isn't spiritual, and it has to be shared physically. Peace and simplicity can be handed on by—well, I suppose it's by prayer, by a sort of mental intention, direction—yes, I guess prayer's the word. They're common goods, no one in the world can monopolize them. They don't dwell with you, they flow through you. At least, isn't that the way you feel about them?"

I nodded eagerly, more and more entranced with this theory.

"So that, some day, when I'm up in the woods," I took my turn at developing the theme, "all alone with the silence and the immensity, if I stop and shut my eyes and pray, leaving my heart open and all my pathways cleared, I may hope to relieve the pressure on some crowded heart in the city."

Christopher nodded too, and we looked into each other's eyes.

"Well!" I said presently. "That gives a new significance to country life. We're living here not primarily for our own pleasure, but that the common life of the world may through us have a measure of peace and simplicity which otherwise it would lack. We're stewards. Or, no, that's not it: we're channels. What a stirring idea!"

"Of course it all depends on us," said Christopher, "whether or not we share. It's that business of intention that does the trick. If we just overflow vaguely our waters don't get anywhere. But if we——"

"Pray," I broke in. "That's the whole thing, isn't it, Christopher? I've been thinking about it a lot lately anyway. Now, thanks to you, I see how can I practice it. Whenever I get a letter from someone in the city complaining of the pres-

sure of life, I shall go up in the woods or the orchard and pray that that person may have my peace, my silence, my sweep of sky and strength of hills. What an interesting experiment! I believe it will work."

"Yes, I believe it will," mused Christopher. "I believe that spiritual influences ('psychic' is the word at present) are more potent than we understand. The vicariousness of experience is one of the Christian ideas we haven't yet developed."

"It's one of the secrets of the monasteries."

"Yes, and how frequently misunderstood! People call monks and nuns selfish because they live apart, but I daresay the world is more indebted to their prayers than to any reformation. Monasteries are just great spiritual dynamos. They charge the world."

"Can we be dynamos, Christopher?"

"Well, maybe, tiny ones."

"We can help clear the way, to give God a chance."

"We can also paint pictures and write books," I continued after another of our thoughtful pauses.

"Yes."

But here Christopher manifested his usual reluctance to think too highly of his handiwork or to

attach any moral value to it, and I understood and shared his feeling.

"It's along that line," I went on, changing the subject without dropping it, "that our critics make another point. They say we need association with other workers and their work in order to develop our talents."

"I don't agree with them," said Christopher with the roundness of utterance which he had already employed during this conversation. "The essence of good work is originality. If you haven't got something different to say, why say anything? And it's only by clearing a space around you that you can strike out your own path."

I saw his point and I nodded slowly.

"The thing is," I said, "to be sure that we stand as near to the heart of reality as we can get, then to write and paint as simply and directly as possible. We can't all find the same heart in the same way, but nobody can find it at all except in his own way."

There was yet another silence. The flames in our candle-sticks still burned steadily, but the wind was rising outside.

"Well," I said presently, "we've disposed of the only criticisms that really count. We've decided that our life here in the country needn't be selfish

and that our work needn't suffer because of it. Now how do you feel about the so-called 'limitations'? Do——"

Christopher interrupted me.

"I love 'em!" he burst out. "Gee! but I love 'em! They're the best things we have. I only wish there were more of them. Why, they're what make it possible for us to get a little below the surface of the things they limit."

"You don't miss music?"

He hesitated. I had touched a vital point.

"Sunsets are music," he answered at length, "and so are moon-rises. I mean, the appeal of music is to an emotional wonder and awe, a sense of divinity, and the beautiful phases of the day and night make the same appeal. A man has only so much of a response to make at a given time. If he makes it to one thing he can't make it to another."

"And the theater?"

"Well, the progress of the seasons is a grand drama."

"And human intercourse?

"Ah!" He threw out an eloquent hand. "Never did I suspect what human intercourse might mean when we lived in the city. There I knew a good many people but they were mostly

of the same type, and we talked about the same things over and over. They weren't ever rawly human with me, either. They had trained nurses when they were sick and plumbers when anything went wrong with their drains. They gave me a pleasant but superficial and limited view of human nature. Now, here in the country, I'm thrown with every kind of person there is, and I go way below the surface with most of them. There was old Plynn." His face sobered. "When would it ever have happened to me in the city to be called in at the last minute to help a neighbor over the Styx? With no trained nurse and no doctor and nothing but stark death. When in the city would I have found myself a deacon of the church and a farmer and a plumber and a chauffeur and a scullery maid" (he grinned at my protest) "and a landscape painter, all at the same time? Golly! when I think of these things, I'm inclined to take back what I said about limitations. There aren't any, and I don't want them. I feel as if, since coming here to live, I've for the first time begun to understand what life and human nature mean."

"There's farming too," I said after a minute, indicating another line of thought.

"Indeed there is!" answered Christopher fervently. "Sometimes I think it's the most impor-

tant and most alarming subject of our day. What's going to happen to the world if the farms lie uncultivated? Oh, if people really want to make sure of serving their fellows, why don't they close their button and chewing gum factories and buy farms? A farmer—I take off my hat to a farmer."

"So, after all," I mused, folding my napkin, for the candles were burning low, "it seems that country life is the real thing."

"It certainly does," Christopher assented. "And when our families talk to us about 'the world,' we're justified in advising them to join us in it as soon as possible."

THE END

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